NIGERIA

Struggle for Stability and Status

STEPHEN WRIGHT

NATIONS OF THE MODERN WORLD
For almost three decades, oil has provided Nigeria with earnings surpassing most other African countries. Such good fortune, in combination with other resources, including a population of nearly 100 million, has contributed to a national sense of importance and destiny. Nevertheless, these aspirations of grandeur have been consistently and perhaps cruelly undermined by a myriad of domestic and external factors.

In this book, Stephen Wright explores a wide range of issues that have arisen since Nigerian independence in 1960 and also seeks to explain the policies and pitfalls of successive military and civilian governments. Two key themes underpin and bring focus to the text, namely Nigeria’s dual struggles for stability and status. Taking into consideration that military governments have held power in Nigeria for all but four years since 1966, the book offers a critical examination of the permutations of government since 1960 and the social, political, and economic factors influencing events. In addition, Wright provides an assessment of current efforts to re-civilianize and (re)democratize the country.

The struggle for status is a more subtle issue, centering on Nigeria’s pursuit of recognition as the “leader” of Africa. An analysis of the country’s foreign policy and position within the international system illuminates the difficulties in achieving this aspiration. The author explores these and other critical themes, providing a clear understanding of Nigerian political economy since 1960 and the challenges Nigeria faces in the closing years of this century.
NIGERIA
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NATIONS OF THE MODERN WORLD: AFRICA
Larry W. Bowman, Series Editor

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NIGERIA
Struggle for Stability and Status

STEPHEN WRIGHT

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<td>ABN</td>
<td>Association for a Better Nigeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABU</td>
<td>Ahmadu Bello University</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>African, Caribbean and Pacific States</td>
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<td>AEC</td>
<td>African Economic Community</td>
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<td>AFRC</td>
<td>Armed Forces Ruling Council</td>
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<td>AG</td>
<td>Action Group</td>
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<td>ANA</td>
<td>Association of Nigerian Authors</td>
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<td>ASUU</td>
<td>Academic Staff Union of Universities</td>
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<tr>
<td>b/d</td>
<td>barrels per day</td>
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<td>BP</td>
<td>British Petroleum</td>
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<td>Christian Association of Nigeria</td>
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<td>CD</td>
<td>Campaign for Democracy</td>
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<td>CDHR</td>
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<td>CDHR</td>
<td>Committee for the Defence of Human Rights</td>
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<td>CEAO</td>
<td>Communauté économique de l’Afrique de l'Ouest</td>
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<td>Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group</td>
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<td>CRP</td>
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<td>gross domestic product</td>
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<tr>
<td>HMSO</td>
<td>Her Majesty’s Stationery Office</td>
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<td>IFIs</td>
<td>international financial institutions</td>
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<td>international governmental organizations</td>
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<td>Interim National Government</td>
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<td>JMA</td>
<td>Jam’iyyar Mutanen Arewa</td>
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<td>LNG</td>
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<td>LPA</td>
<td>Lagos Plan of Action</td>
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<td>MAMSER</td>
<td>Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice, Self-Reliance and Economic Recovery</td>
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<td>MOSOP</td>
<td>Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People</td>
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<td>MPLA</td>
<td>Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola</td>
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<td>NADECO</td>
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<td>NAM</td>
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<td>National Defence and Security Council</td>
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<td>NEPU</td>
<td>Northern Elements Progressive Union</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>nongovernmental organization</td>
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<td>NIDL</td>
<td>New International Division of Labor</td>
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<td>NIIA</td>
<td>Nigerian Institute of International Affairs</td>
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<td>NNDP</td>
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<td>Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation</td>
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<td>National Orientation Movement</td>
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<td>National Party of Nigeria</td>
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<td>Full Name</td>
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<td>NPP</td>
<td>Nigeria People's Party</td>
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<td>NUPENG</td>
<td>National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers</td>
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<td>NYM</td>
<td>Nigerian Youth Movement</td>
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<td>NYSC</td>
<td>National Youth Service Corps</td>
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<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organization of African Unity</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>OIC</td>
<td>Organization of the Islamic Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPEC</td>
<td>Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLOs</td>
<td>Presidential Liaison Offices</td>
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<td>PRP</td>
<td>People's Redemption Party</td>
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<td>RBDAs</td>
<td>River Basin Development Authorities</td>
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<td>RMI</td>
<td>Road Maintenance Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>RNC</td>
<td>Royal Niger Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWAFF</td>
<td>Royal West Africa Frontier Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>structural adjustment program</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCOA</td>
<td>Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCSA</td>
<td>Supreme Council for Sport in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFEM</td>
<td>Second-Tier Foreign Exchange Market</td>
</tr>
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<td>SMC</td>
<td>Supreme Military Council</td>
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<td>TAC</td>
<td>Technical Aid Corps</td>
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<td>United Democratic Front of Nigeria</td>
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<td>UMBC</td>
<td>United Middle Belt Congress</td>
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<td>UNCP</td>
<td>United Nigeria Congress Party</td>
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<td>UNECA</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission for Africa</td>
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<td>United Progressive Grand Alliance</td>
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<td>UPP</td>
<td>United Peoples Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAFF</td>
<td>West African Frontier Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAI</td>
<td>War Against Indiscipline</td>
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<td>WASU</td>
<td>West African Students' Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIN</td>
<td>Women in Nigeria</td>
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Note: An official map showing the boundaries of states created in 1996 was not available at the time of writing.

Nigeria
NIGERIA

THE NIGERIAN

PANORAMA

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, and a major economic power in the world.

The country's diverse culture, vibrant music, and rich history make it a popular destination for tourists. The capital, Abuja, is home to the National Museum and the National Theatre, which host exhibitions and performances throughout the year.

The Nigerian economy is primarily based on agriculture, with palm oil, cocoa, and rubber being major export commodities. The country is also known for its significant oil reserves.

In recent years, Nigeria has faced challenges such as political instability, corruption, and violence, particularly in the oil-rich Niger Delta region.

Despite these issues, Nigeria continues to be a hub for tourism and cultural exchange in the continent.
Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country and, economically, one of the continent’s strongest. Successive governments have tried to position the country as the “champion” or leader of Africa, pursuing high-profile foreign policies both within the continent and throughout the wider international community.

Such a strategy has often been undermined by the ebb and flow of political and economic forces inside the country. The military has controlled government for all but four years since 1966, the exception being the eventful yet short-lived Second Republic of 1979–1983. Military governments have not necessarily affected the formulation and focus of Nigerian foreign policy, but they have had a clear impact on domestic political stability, democracy, and accountability. This has been especially true during the 1990s as the military governments of General Ibrahim Babangida and, after 1993, General Sani Abacha thwarted the transition to civilian rule and governed society in an increasingly repressive manner. In addition, political frustrations have been exacerbated by declining economic conditions, which in turn have inflamed ethnic and religious tensions.

The origins of many of the problems afflicting Nigerian society can be traced back to the colonial era. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that Britain formally brought the territory to become known as Nigeria under full colonial control; but a British presence in the region had been there centuries before, initially conflicting with Portuguese and French interests, and then surpassing them.

Nigeria made little sense as a country except to imperial mapmakers. The country was grabbed in the wholesale “Scramble for Africa” at the end of the nineteenth century, when British forces amalgamated many diverse ethnic and re-
ligious groups into the new colonial state. The convenient policy of "indirect rule" offered a limited form of autonomy for each region (particularly in the north), though always within the overriding constraints of colonial rule.

A paradoxical set of forces in the first half of the twentieth century led to certain critical issues with which Nigeria had to grapple after independence on 1 October 1960. On the one hand, Nigerians gradually became inculcated with a "national consciousness" as the country developed some measure of cohesion and character. This trend, accentuated by post–World War II nationalist movements and anticolonial (hence pro-“Nigerian”) sentiments, became imperative after independence with efforts at nation building and the construction of foreign policy.

On the other hand, indirect rule and the creation of distinct regional governments and economies fragmented the embryonic Nigerian unity and established rivalries between ethnic and religious groups that undermined the fragile consensus. The nationalist movement itself, though not national in composition, was a national umbrella for various subnational groupings. After independence, these built-in tensions mushroomed, contributing to the collapse of the First Republic in 1966 and to the ensuing bloody civil war over Biafran secession. This war cast a shadow over the Nigerian psyche, and its memory perhaps helped to prevent similar secessionary attempts.

In the late 1990s, however, as the harsh lessons of Biafra recede into memory, increasing agitation for an alternative political structure has occurred; yet the military's continuing tight control has limited such possibilities. For some observers, it is not the failure of institutions or structures that is to blame for Nigeria's woeful performance but, rather, the individual political and military leaders who have successfully and successfully undermined the confidence and character of the nation.

Nigerian Political Economy

Nigeria has the advantage of possessing distinct climatic zones that allow for a diverse range of agricultural possibilities. British colonizers sought to capitalize on this feature, converting traditional subsistence farming in many areas over to export production of cash crops. Indeed, such crops were earmarked for British rather than Nigerian consumption.

Three crops came to dominate colonial production: groundnuts (peanuts) in the north of the country, where semi-arid conditions prevailed; cocoa in the moist, tropical southwest; and palm oil in the southeast, also characterized by tropical conditions. Infrastructure was built to assist the exploitation and export of such crops, with little effort directed to indigenous interests. A decision not to expand the railway to the northwestern city of Sokoto was one of few examples of British acquiescence to domestic concerns—in this case, the preference of the Sultan of Sokoto to keep the railway at a distance. Commodity boards established to organize production and sales of Nigeria's cash crops became enmeshed in the political structure of the regions, as politicians struggled to enhance their political
careers by gaining influence and revenue from the boards. The distinct economic bases thus formed helped to reinforce separate regional identities and political economies.

At independence, agriculture accounted for more than half of all exports and two-thirds of the gross domestic product (GDP). But its importance was soon to decline. Agriculture has now been relegated to a marginal economic role, at least in terms of exports and balance of trade criteria, though not in terms of subsistence farming or employment. The culprit and savior was petroleum. The importance of oil exploration and exports slowly became recognized in the early 1960s. The civil war was partly fought over control of the oil fields and revenues of the southeast, although the intensity of the war slowed the full exploitation of oil fields until the 1970s.

The late 1970s witnessed the peak of oil revenues. As a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Nigeria capitalized on the financial gains of the post-1973 period and by the end of the 1970s was touting itself, and respectfully being courted, as the "champion" of Africa. The oil boom also had a crucial impact on the domestic political economy as revenues accrued to the federal government, increasing its influence over state governments within the country. These "easy-come" revenues led to a profligate federal government, which sprayed money on projects and policies with little regard for the broader problems involved. Such wealth also accentuated the trend of corruption within the polity, raising it to an art form in the Second Republic.

By the mid-1980s the golden age had already passed, and by the early 1990s Nigeria was facing critical economic and political conditions. Its failure to diversify from a single traded commodity, albeit oil, put the country in a precarious position, as did its failure to develop more substantial trade relations within the African continent. Nigeria's important role in creating the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 did not translate into making that a very meaningful organization.

Other factors accentuated the chronic condition of the economy. Increasing debt, structural adjustment, decreased foreign investment, rampant corruption, and a soft oil market all were causes, and features, of the poor economy. The failure to implement democratic reforms in the 1990s (especially evident with the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, which brought victory to Chief Moshood Abiola, a Muslim Yoruba) led to some modest sanctions by the Commonwealth, the European Union (EU), and the United States. Although the sanctions themselves were relatively mild, deliberately excluding oil exports, they contributed to the environment of ostracism that weakened Nigeria's economic linkages and undermined its national pride and status.

Consideration of the performance of Nigerian political structures and institutions since independence is a rather grim undertaking. Aside from two brief periods of civilian government—the First Republic (1960–1966) and the Second Republic (1979–1983)—the military has controlled the country throughout. It
would be oversimplistic, and yet not unjustified, to say that the periods of civilian government were marked by internal instability and mismanagement, with military incursions deemed by many Nigerians, at least initially, to be positive. But neither military nor civilian elites have found a way to bring true stability, prosperity, and accountability to the country, and successive leaderships have plundered its wealth to the majority’s detriment.

Formal independence in October 1960 ushered in the First Republic, whose federal government was controlled by a cautious, conservative Islamic establishment drawn largely from the northern region. The three regional governments—north, west, east, and, after 1964, the mid-west—maintained significant power in both domestic and foreign policy, and so were able to challenge the status of the federal government. Increasing constitutional crises led to a breakdown of government, two military coups d’etat in 1966, and, eventually, civil war.

The military government of General Yakubu Gowon successfully prosecuted the civil war and subsequent peace, and also reconfigured the political structure by breaking up the powerful regions into weaker, smaller states—a trend that continued sporadically into the 1990s. (As of this writing, thirty-six states have been established in anticipation of the 1998 elections.) Such devolution helped to placate some ethnic sentiments, as many of the larger groups were given a measure of control over their local affairs; but it also compounded the cost and bureaucracy of government, and exacerbated corruption by increasing the elite’s size and access to resources. The creation of new states apparently only whetted the appetite for even more states.

A successful transition program undertaken by the government of Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo brought a civilian government to office in 1979. Excessive corruption and ethnic heavy-handedness, along with other faults, brought the Shehu Shagari government into increasing conflict with states controlled by opposition parties. These and other factors contributed to the downfall of the government and its overthrow at the hands of General Mohammadu Buhari on 31 December 1983. Military rule has ensued since then, with renewed civilian government contemplated but not implemented.

The 1990s have witnessed increasing repression as military arrogance has clashed with populist ambitions for democracy. Attempts to develop a “new” civilian political class to inherit government merely served to revitalize an “old guard” linked to the ways of the past, and so was hardly encouragement to those who hoped for a radical transformation of the political economy. Abiola’s election in 1993 reflected a significant break with the politics of ethnicity and region, but it caused sufficient qualms for the military to annul the election, freeze the transition program, and stifle democracy.

Overall, then, the political leaders of Nigeria, both civilian and military, have done little to bring pride to themselves. In failing to promote development in its widest sense, they have left the country well short of fulfilling its potential. Current tensions intersect with ethnic-religious, federal-state, civilian-military,
elite-masses, radical-conservative, and autarkic-globalist issues. Creation of a viable, stable Nigerian state able to exhibit widespread development and to compete on the global stage thus remains an elusive task.

Nigeria in a Regional Context

Understanding Nigeria's West African setting is an important element in assessing the country. In terms of population size and economic output, Nigeria is roughly equal to all the other fifteen members of ECOWAS combined. Such potential strength has assisted it in developing a high-profile policy, which has led some observers to consider the country a regional hegemon. In the 1970s, its relative economic strength gained from oil wealth allowed it to become the lead player in bringing ECOWAS to fruition, overcoming criticism that this organization would be a vehicle for its hegemonic ambitions.

Constraining Nigeria in its regional setting are several factors, not least of which are the low levels of official trade between member-states. Nigeria is surrounded by countries that were all former colonies of France, a circumstance that has led to an interesting mix of problems relating to culture, economy, language, and security. Unease and suspicion, sometimes well founded, have hampered Nigeria's relations with its neighbors and with France since independence. These tensions were exacerbated by francophone support for Biafran secession. Nigeria's neighbors maintained membership of their francophone Communauté économique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO) for more than a decade after the formation of ECOWAS, thus causing additional tensions within the region.

During the oil-boom years, successive Nigerian governments were able to pacify the country's neighbors with largesse, inasmuch as they were very liberal with aid and assistance. As economic problems have increased, the level of overt support has declined; however, Nigeria continues to carry a significant share of the ECOWAS cost, including hosting the Secretariat and paying a sizable contribution to the Liberian and Sierra Leonean peacekeeping operations in the 1990s. Nagging border disputes with Chad and Cameroon have upset many Nigerians who believe that such occurrences are disrespectful to the country's stature.

The ECOWAS region contains a broad mix of leaders, from democrats (occasionally) to tyrants (often). Efforts to promote greater democracy across the region have largely failed, so in this respect Nigeria shares in the common experience. The question of hegemonic power is a more difficult one to answer, as this foreign policy goal has not been pursued consistently over a significant period of time. Cultural differences are less constraining today than at independence, but they still throw some light on issues relating to Nigeria's regional ambitions and difficulties.

At the continental level, Nigeria was an original member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its inception in 1963. Nigeria did not play a forceful role, however. It was overshadowed by the outspoken radical voice of Kwame
Nkrumah, Ghana's leader. Nigeria exercised caution in an effort to distance itself from Nkrumah's radicalism, at least within the ruling Islamic establishment.

Following the civil war, and taking advantage of growing oil revenues (and Ghana's internal chaos), Yakubu Gowon led Nigeria to a more activist role in African politics. Perhaps the crystallizing event for foreign policy came in 1975, after Murtala Muhammed had overthrown Gowon; during that year, Nigeria expressed highly vocal support for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) faction in Angola's protracted struggle for independence. Nigeria's actions and pressure helped to break the OAU deadlock and brought OAU support for the MPLA. This action, building on Nigeria's activist role in creating ECOWAS as well as on its leadership role in negotiations for the new Lomé Convention in 1975, was followed in 1977 with the country's hosting of Festac, an international Black Arts festival, and, later, with its assistance in negotiations toward Zimbabwean independence. Nigeria's vocal and financial support for the Front-Line States (FLS) in challenging apartheid South Africa became an accepted role for the aspiring "champion" of Africa. Serious discussion concerning the acquisition of nuclear weapons to combat South Africa's military strength was widespread in Nigeria. By the early 1980s, its influence within the continent was at a peak.

Although Nigeria retained significant stature in the continent, exemplified by its hosting of OAU summits leading to the 1981 Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) for economic revival and the 1991 establishment of the program toward an African Economic Community (AEC), its own economic and political difficulties undermined this role. The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, combined with the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, also changed the balance of forces in the continent, leading Western powers to place greater emphasis on political conditionalities for assistance. Postapartheid South Africa also attracted greater international attention and investment, and was seen to be challenging Nigeria for the role of Africa's "champion."

Themes of the Book

The subtitle of this book, Struggle for Stability and Status, reflects the primary themes to be addressed in subsequent chapters. Consider, first, the many elements of Nigerian struggle, which are somewhat typical of an African state. In particular, the key advantage of oil revenues has been squandered to date, or, at least, has not been effectively used to lessen the struggle of the majority to maintain a basic standard of living.

Stability, in turn, can be discussed primarily in relation to the political sphere, although there are wider economic and societal elements involved as well. I have already hinted at some of these issues: the failure of civilian governments; long periods of military rule; tensions relating to ethnicity, class, and religion; and infringements of human rights and freedom of speech. Given the aborted transition program in 1993, there are few guarantees that the transition to civilian rule in October 1998 will go smoothly.
The theme of economic stability also calls to mind the strivings of Nigeria's leaders, sometimes in good faith but more often not, to provide prosperity and economic security for the majority of Nigerians. Massive oil revenues in the 1970s were siphoned off by the political and military elites, condemning the majority to an abysmal standard of living. And poor economic performance as well as a weak position in the international division of labor have made the struggle for economic security more difficult still.

The struggle for status is the other key theme of the book. This element emanates more from Nigerians' perception of themselves as Africa's chosen people, as possessing an importance beyond that of other, more ordinary African states. This perception is perhaps partly fact and partly fantasy inasmuch as Nigeria's relative size and wealth do position the country "ahead of the pack" within the continent. Its strength within West Africa, however, has not been maximized. And its status within the continent and beyond has diminished somewhat in recent years in contrast to the heyday of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The struggle to maintain this status is, indeed, an interesting one to analyze.

The framework of the book is a relatively straightforward one. Chapter 2 outlines the main facets of the colonial period, illustrating how many of those earlier experiences affected postindependent society. Particular emphasis is placed on post–World War II developments and the mechanics of decolonization. Next, Chapter 3 highlights critical features of the society and culture, attempting to explain the development and influence of ethnic, religious, class, and gender issues. It also considers such societal factors as the significance of censuses, the nature of education, and the role of the media and authors.

Chapter 4 follows with a discussion of the political structure of Nigeria, addressing not only the experiments with both parliamentary and presidential structures of government in the First and Second Republics, respectively, but also the various shades of military rule. The country's institutions, while important, are perhaps secondary to the endemic issues of political life with which they contend. These issues, and the myriad problems facing the leadership of Abacha, provide the main focus of this chapter. Reasons for the endemic instability within the country are also analyzed.

Nigeria's economic framework is the subject of Chapter 5. The transformation of the country from an agricultural society to a petroleum-based one is intriguing, as are the triumphs and failures of the state in managing the oil bonanza. The slide from boom to bust has been accompanied by growing international intrusion on the part of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the structural adjustment program (SAP). Despite efforts at export diversification, Nigeria remains dependent on oil for more than 90 percent of its export revenues and, as such, occupies a precarious position within the global economy. The themes of development, corruption, equality, and long-term economic security are also explored in this chapter.

Chapter 6, which focuses on the international policies of Nigeria, considers both the African continent and the country's relations with the outside world, particu-
larly the EU countries and the United States. The decision-making processes and aspirations of Nigeria’s leadership are examined in this chapter, along with the impact of the changing post–Cold War, postapartheid environment.

The epilogue attempts to draw these disparate themes together and speculates about likely trends, particularly within the domestic political arena. Although there are some grounds for optimism, the immediate prospects are uncertain, especially given the immense difficulties involved in Nigeria’s attempts to achieve democratic and economic transition simultaneously.

**Notes**

1. The terms *west* and *east* denote regional governments that geographically were in the southwest and southeast of the country, respectively. The mid-west was sandwiched in between them.
Nigeria was a creation of British colonialism. Prior to the end of the nineteenth century, what we recognize today as Nigeria did not exist in any shape or form. It was only over a period of several decades that British imperial policy brought the disparate peoples and ecological zones into what was to become Nigeria. The name itself was drawn up in January 1897 by Flora Shaw (later Lady Lugard), colonial editor of *The Times* of London, without a hint of consideration for the views of "Nigerians" themselves.

If the creation of Nigeria (as with many other African states) was bizarrely drawn from European imperial arrogance, then policies carried out by British colonial authorities in the first half of the twentieth century served to create the social and political identities of the colony, with long-term implications. Policies drawn more for British than African advantage gradually constructed the framework for the modern nation. Unfortunately, these policies led to problems that the infant Nigerian state after 1960 was unable to withstand.

This chapter provides a glimpse of the West African region prior to colonialism and summarizes key elements in the political economy of the colony of Nigeria in the first half of the twentieth century. Both the challenge of nationalism and the decolonization exercise are considered, and the chapter concludes with an assessment of the legacy of colonization on independent Nigeria.
Precolonial “Nigeria”

Indigenous Populations

Although British colonizers and missionaries played down, and often appeared oblivious to, the oral histories and cultural strength of indigenous peoples at the time of colonization, we are now well aware of the vitality and complexity of the indigenous states that British colonization effectively undermined. Nigerian civilization has been traced back to the Stone Age by scholars who have chronicled the Nok people near Zaria. The social and industrial changes that occurred in Europe in the 1700s and 1800s had been blocked from expansion into Africa by the oceans and the Sahara Desert, leading Europeans to perceive Africa as a “backward” and “dark” continent. Yet Nigeria’s proud traditions continue today, so an understanding of the country’s distinctive cultures helps explain many contemporary conflicts within society.1

Although there are too many indigenous states to mention here, a few of the larger ones are discussed to give some indication of their precolonial stature.2 Ife, located amid dense forests in the southwest of contemporary Nigeria, was and remains at the heart of the Yoruba civilization. According to oral history, Oduduwa, father of the Yoruba, moved to Ife many centuries ago and through his sons established a Yoruba empire encompassing fourteen kingdoms stretching across today’s southern Nigeria and Benin, with linkages to the Ashanti in Ghana. Order was kept through policy coordination between obas (kings) and senior chiefs, with the Oni of Ife and the Alafin of Oyo being the most respected leaders. Distinctive clans, however, continued to create internal divisions and trade rivalries within the Yoruba, a circumstance that has persisted into the twentieth century. It was only during the colonial occupation that a Yoruba “consciousness” developed, partly to protect its people from colonial policy and to preserve its rights in competition with other ethnic groups within the country.

Oyo and Benin became critical centers of power. The Oyo empire encompassed Lagos, which grew through the slave and gun trade, and stretched across modern-day Benin and Togo and inland northward to the Niger River. Benin, in turn, became a renowned center of art; during the earliest colonial explorations in the 1600s, Europeans marveled at the bronze sculptures of Benin’s artisans. In the 1700s, the power of the Oyo empire weakened due to internal strife and increasing European intrusions. And in the early 1800s, Fulani invaders from the north extended the influence of Islam to Ilorin and Oyo, without completely subjugating the latter, thus fostering internal political and economic struggles between Yoruba groups that still resonate. Today, although Yoruba live largely within the southern “Christian” belt of Nigeria, many of them are Muslim and numerous extended families encompass both religions.

In the southeast of contemporary Nigeria, a related, though more amorphous, social group were the Igbo (or Ibo) people. Unlike the Yoruba, the Igbo had less
clearly defined authority structures, although they could trace themselves back through common language and belief to an original founder, Chuku. Ancestors controlled village life, and it remained the task of the head of the household to converse with them to maintain political and social order. Village government was maintained by family heads or elders sitting together in consultation with the senior elder, or Okpara, who chaired meetings but did not rule. Owing to dense forests, the region lacked centralized authority, and such localized democracy made the imposition of colonial authority and indirect rule over the Igbo a very difficult matter. The British decided to create a local “chiefs” system through which to rule; but this decision backfired, resulting in tremendous local protest.

In the north of the country, a thousand years or more of Islamic influence and Sahelian trade had fashioned very different, though no less distinguished, civilizations in the Bildad as-Sudan (Arabic for the “land of the blacks”). The Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem-Bornu (Fulani) empires had successively led Islamic conquest and scholarship. The last of these prevailed in the northeast of Nigeria and beyond from the thirteenth century onward. The occupation by Morocco of the Songhai empire in 1590 cut off the Fulani from positive influences from the north and contributed to a gradual social decline throughout the next century. Neighboring Hausa city-states, such as Kano, Katsina, and Zaria, continued to flourish as major trading centers involved in the distribution of goods, especially leather, across West Africa and north across the Sahara to Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan. Moroccan leather, so admired in Europe at this time, may in fact have been Sokoto leather that was carried across the Sahara by Kano traders. Today, Hausa traders are widely dispersed across West Africa, and Hausa descendants are liberally scattered across the land route to Mecca.

Intra-Hausa rivalries and complacency during the eighteenth century made the Hausa vulnerable to the jihad, or holy war, launched against them in 1804 by their Fulani brethren from the northeast. Forces loyal to the Fulani spiritual leader and scholar Shehu Usman dan Fodiyo swept across northern Nigeria and established their capital in the northwestern city of Sokoto, which remained the Islamic spiritual capital after dan Fodiyo’s death in 1817—a status it arguably retains to this day. This revival of Islam brought something of a “golden” age to northern Nigeria, during which the Sultan of Sokoto became a paramount leader, the Sarkin Musulmi, controlling the faithful through the Emir of Gwandu and other subordinate emirs across the Sahelian region.

This Sokoto caliphate levied taxes and maintained order through Sharia, or Islamic, law. Its educational system was dominated by the Koran and the learning of the holy book. The northern region was the last to be consumed by colonial authorities into Nigeria, partly because the region itself was so vast and partly because colonial ventures came from southern, coastal locations. The internal strength of the caliphate made it an ideal ground for the British policy of “indirect rule,” using local authorities and power structures to rule rather than imposing external force. This distinctiveness of the northern region relative to other coastal
regions became accentuated during the colonial period and provided a basis for confrontation after independence.

There were many other smaller "states" in the centuries prior to Nigeria's colonization, each with its own cultural characteristics, ethnic identity, and political style. Many of these groups were in contact with each other, especially in the middle belt where trade with north and south made them pivotal and influential. In the southeast, the major trading ports of Calabar and Warri gave similar advantages to the smaller ethnic groups located there. It was only during the colonial period, however, that they were arbitrarily forced together within the confines of a single state. Thus developed the "minorities" issue, whereby Igala, Nupe, and Tiv of the middle belt were forced under the influence of the dominant Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Efik and Ibibio were drawn into the eastern region under the control of the Igbo, and the Bini were sandwiched between competing Igbo and Yoruba groups in the mid-west. In the "Scramble for Africa" at the end of the nineteenth century, strong independent identities and oral histories were ignored in the pursuit of empire, and European technology and ambition overcame the resistance of these peoples to colonial incorporation. Existing states were destroyed and the new state of Nigeria was created.

**European Intrusions**

Britain's earliest contact with the region took place in 1553, but no inroads were made in terms of either trade or conquest, and the British did not return for another century. Portuguese traders first visited the Bight of Benin in 1472, thus predating the British. Portuguese (and later Brazilian) traders remained important in the arms and slave trade for several centuries, making Lagos a significant port. During the nineteenth century, they were displaced in more legitimate trade by British, French, and, eventually, German traders. After its 1713 victory in Europe, Britain supplanted Spain in terms of primacy over the slave trade; indeed, the West African coast was critical to the triangular trade, shipping slaves to the plantations of the Americas. Exports of palm oil and imports of consumer products gradually increased in importance, taking center stage after the official abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1807—although domestic slavery in the United States and West Africa was not affected.

An African Association was established in London in 1788 to help promote the discovery of the "dark continent" and give impetus to trade and the civilization mission, with a particular interest in the potential wealth of the Niger River region. Interest was piqued by the adventures of such explorers as Mungo Park and Hugh Clapperton, the latter reaching far into the hinterland to Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto in the 1820s. In the 1840s, British interests in southern Nigeria, notably Abeokuta and Lagos, were boosted by the growth of missionary activity led by a Yoruba freed slave from Freetown, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who continued to be active until his death in 1891. Economic interests grew modestly, and the
port of Lagos was acquired for the crown in 1861—much later than Sierra Leone (1787) and Gambia (1588) had been occupied by the British. The affairs of Lagos continued to be run from the important garrison at Freetown for another twenty-five years before Lagos demanded more careful attention.

Britain extended its influence over southern Nigeria through bible and gun and, in June 1885, claimed a protectorate stretching from Lagos across 400 miles of coastal area to Cameroon and some 250 miles inland. The area was known as the Lagos and Oil Rivers Protectorate, later named the Niger Coast Protectorate. This move was predicated by the need to protect Lagos trade as well as by the 1884–1885 Berlin conference that had set forth certain ground rules for sharing out African colonial spoils among European states—with no African input, of course—based on the principle of “effective occupation.” The British needed to move to protect important trade routes and markets and to squeeze out the growing French and German competition in the region.\(^7\) Germany had beaten out Britain from Cameroon, even though the British had been trading there and in Spanish Guinea for decades before the Germans’ arrival.\(^8\) As part of this assertive policy, and to retaliate for a fatal ambush of a British delegation, the kingdom of Benin was forcibly and brutally occupied by the British in 1897, the centenary of which was recently “celebrated” in Nigeria.

This colonial frenzy in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century saw all but 10 percent of the African continent colonized in a complex mix of political, economic, strategic, cultural, and religious rationales. A nineteenth-century “domino” theory—which posited that Britain needed numerous African centers (and therefore expenditure, contrary to normal colonial policy) to protect the vital route to India, the “jewel” in the British crown—was one plausible explanation; another pointed to the sheer rivalry and competition among Europeans for colonial possessions.

The British colonizers talked of a “dual mandate” in promoting “civilization” of a European fashion and economic development in the continent, although British prosperity naturally remained a much higher priority. Some commentators doubt whether there was a true “policy” or purpose to the colonial occupation of Nigeria. John Hatch, for example, writes that “[c]olonial rule was imposed without any understanding of its implications, any vision as to its consequences, or any plan for the future of its people.”\(^9\)

Jibrin Ibrahim, on the other hand, considers one aspect of the colonizers’ mission to have been religious in nature: “An essential aspect of the ‘civilising mission’ of the colonial authorities was the concerted effort to eradicate the practice and symbols of traditional African religions. Within a few years countless gods, deities, totems, or idols, to use the official terminology, were plucked from their sacred repositories only to re-emerge in new shrines in Europe known as museums.”\(^10\) This “civilising mission” was, of course, based on ignorance and stereotypes of the “dark” continent, but that fact did not prevent Britain from continuing to turn a blind eye to widespread domestic slavery within its expanding arena.
of interest. Such slave labor was vital in that it facilitated trade across treacherous terrain (treacherous at least for Europeans); and as the rapid expansion of empire had left British colonizers short-handed, there was little reason to antagonize local chiefs. Gradually, labor and trade came under the control of large foreign companies, squeezing out African entrepreneurs. Combined with the more formal colonization of the country, domestic slavery was gradually abolished.

British Colonization

The Political Arena Before 1945

The Northern Protectorate, headquartered at Lokoja on the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers (and later moved to Kaduna), was established in January 1900 with Colonel Frederick Lugard as High Commissioner. The protectorate represented not fact but intention and determination to control, as only a very small area of the north was actually under British control, although the French were led to believe otherwise and were persuaded to drop their claims to it. As Robert Heussler points out about the north, “Far and away the greater part of the dependency was unknown territory, a land whose inhabitants were as oblivious of the power now raising its flag in their midst as the new rulers were ignorant of them and of their country.”

This situation changed over the next few years as Lugard used the punitive military force of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) to quell resistance, selecting force over diplomacy and operating more or less outside the wishes of the British government. With just twenty-four British officers and 700 African troops, the WAFF occupied Kano in January 1903 and Sokoto one month later, installing a new sultan conducive to British interests. Resistance was fierce and continued sporadically for several years, with a major uprising in Sokoto in 1906. Most of the troops used in this subjugation were Africans from the south. Today we might consider the implications of using “Nigerians” to fight “Nigerians”; but at this time the north was a foreign land, and, in any case, there was a tradition of war and empire in the region. In 1906, Lagos and the Southern Protectorate were amalgamated for administrative efficiency into the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, but the north remained outside this control.

Several problems faced the authoritarian Lugard in his administration of the Northern Protectorate between 1900 and 1906 and after 1912 when he became governor of Nigeria following a return from a posting in Hong Kong. Controlling the north was likely to be difficult after its militaristic takeover, given the large geographical area involved and the lack of British administrative and military personnel. According to the 1921 census, there was a grand total of 4,000 Europeans in Nigeria. As a contemporary observer stated: “Cordial cooperation between the Emir, his officials, the peasantry, and the Resident, is the keynote of the policy of Northern Nigeria, and the ideal aimed at. If it fails, all fails. For there neither are,
nor ever can be, any British troops permanently quartered in West Africa to enforce British supremacy on a hostile or discontented people.”

It was made clear by the Colonial Office in London that little or no funding was to be forthcoming for the colonial expansion, especially after the recent financial burden of the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa. Collection of taxes from subjects, a topic close to colonial administrators' hearts, was likely to be difficult. The north, although it possessed a solid economic base, lacked finances partly because its exports and trade passed through Lagos; as a result, the south was enabled to keep customs revenues.

In order to offset these financial problems, and ignoring opposition to linking dissimilar regions, Lugard authorized the amalgamation of the southern and northern regions on 1 January 1914, thereby providing, for the first time, a rough geographical outline of contemporary Nigeria. In doing so, Lugard enabled revenues from the southwest to be drawn on by other regions, particularly the hard-pressed north; but he maintained separate bureaucracies to run the north and south. A system of “indirect rule” evolved in the northern region to facilitate taxation and avoid stretching the colonial administration’s limited staff. The emirate mechanism, openly admired by most colonial officials and by the influential Mary Kingsley16 for its ability to control and tax the northern population, was retained to levy taxes to be passed over to the colonial authorities in return for allowing the emirs to retain some traditional power and authority within the region—even though the north was still under the supreme authority of the crown.17 Long chains of command also gave local resident officers on the ground significant discretion to develop policy.

This system worked fairly well in the north with the established and deferential Islamic society; but when attempted in the south it fared poorly (as the British admitted), partly because of the less hierarchical and more fragmented authority structures there.18 Missionary and European education, in both Nigeria and Britain, provided a sizable educated elite in these regions—an elite that challenged British authority on its own terms. British control, particularly in the southeast, proved extremely difficult because there was little tradition of chiefs and leadership and a very devolved system of government based on the village and clan. To be effective, British control needed indigenous leaders, so leaders were created by the colonial authorities and imposed upon the people. These “warrant chiefs” proved highly controversial; never accepted as legitimate in the eastern region, they were later replaced by leaders more acceptable to indigenes.

Nigeria was ruled as a fairly typical (though prestigious) crown colony, where a governor exercised control on behalf of the crown. The 1922 constitution established this arrangement, whereby a governor was helped by an Executive Council and Legislative Council. The smaller Executive Council contained top advisers such as lieutenant-governors of the regions, the attorney-general, the head of military staff and the treasury, and so on. No African members served on the Executive Council until the 1940s.
The larger Legislative Council had the power to pass law for the south. In turn, the governor (who directly ruled the north until 1946) had the power to overrule the Legislative Council on any matter. After 1922, the council consisted of twenty-six officials and fifteen nonofficials nominated by the governor. There were only four elected members, three for Lagos and one to represent Calabar.

The need to fight an election for these African seats led Herbert Macauley to establish the Nigerian National Democratic Party in 1923. Despite its name, the party was Lagos based, successfully winning these seats at the 1923, 1928, and 1933 elections. Macauley also used his newspaper, the Lagos Daily News, to challenge government policy. This was the first formal political party within the country, but it was built upon Macauley’s activities in Accra in March 1920, when he helped to establish the National Congress of British West Africa (NCWA), encompassing other African nationalists from Gambia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), and Sierra Leone. Both parties were active in pushing London for greater rights for Africans in the West African colonies, including Nigeria, but they remained elitist and weak. After 1925, the West African Students’ Union (WASU), founded by the Nigerian student Ladipo Solanke, was established in London in further support of the cause.

Nationalist pressure against the colonial authorities grew from the experiences of World War I (in which Nigerian troops were used in Cameroon, Togo, and East Africa) and was further strengthened throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The Lagos Youth Movement was established in 1934 to oppose the opening of the Yaba Higher College, deemed an inferior college for African use. In 1936, the movement was renamed the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in an attempt to give it wider appeal. A year later, another outstanding figure in the nationalist movement appeared on the scene—namely, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (“Zik”), who would eventually become Nigeria’s first post-independence president. Azikiwe had been studying and teaching in the United States at Lincoln and Howard universities and became a member of the NYM’s executive. In November 1937 he founded the West African Pilot newspaper to push the nationalist position. Its motto, “Show the light and the people will find the way,” summed up its perceived role, and the paper itself carried more popular legitimacy than the government-owned Daily Times, which had been established in 1926. Azikiwe also opened four provincial daily papers in Ibadan (Southern Nigeria Defender), Onitsha (Nigerian Spokesman), Port Harcourt (Eastern Nigeria Guardian) and, most important, Kano (Comet), thereby spreading political action to the north. However, Zik’s radicalism, combined with his Igbo ethnicity, alienated moderate Yoruba—a problem that surfaced over the coming decade.

The strength of the NYM was sufficient for it to win the majority of seats in the 1938 Legislative Council elections, helped by its own newspaper the Daily Service; but internal rivalries and divisions soon sapped its energies. In 1941, Azikiwe resigned from the party over a dispute about a nomination to the Legislative Council. He took the bulk of the Igbo members with him, leaving the movement
functioning effectively only in Ibadan under the growing leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. After World War II this rump was to become the foundation of the Action Group party, and the Daily Service was converted to the Tribune. The fluidity and pressure brought about during the war led to a reconfiguration of the primary nationalist movement, bringing Macauley and Azikiwe together in 1944 with the founding of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, later renamed the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). Macauley became president and Azikiwe secretary-general, and both prepared the party for the intensification of the nationalist effort at the end of the war in 1945.

Creating the Colonial Economy

In the case of Nigeria and many other African colonies, trade (and the bible) preceded the flag. British traders were heavily involved in the region for two centuries before colonial control was formalized. Such formal control was required to protect British trade interests from other European competitors and was a prerequisite to the claiming of territory under the terms of the 1885 Berlin agreement. Prospects for further economic expansion into the hinterland also called for governmental protection, although London was keen to carry out this expansion with a minimum of expense.

The profile of the colonial economy began to take shape during the 1800s with the expansion of critical cash crops, notably cocoa and palm oil, both of which found excellent growing conditions in southern, coastal Nigeria and proved to be important income substitutes for the receding slave trade. Palm oil provided almost three-quarters of Lagos’s exports in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and remained Nigeria’s primary export as late as the 1950s. Cocoa was introduced by freed slaves returning from the Americas in the early 1800s, whereas palm oil was introduced in the mid-1800s.

Both products were largely in the hands of African farmers and traders who were initially considered “equals” in trade, but by the early twentieth century they had clearly come under the controlling and stifling influence of large European businesses. Prior to 1900 coastal Nigeria had had a strong tradition of international trade with Europe, an advantage that the north lacked. During the 1800s these indigenous interests were gradually undermined, and markets for such European products as foodstuffs and textiles were found in Nigeria to the detriment of African producers.20

Much of the initial trade interest in the coastal region came from companies in the Liverpool and Manchester areas, as well as from London. As the pace for a stronger British presence accelerated, particularly in the north, a Royal Charter was awarded in July 1886 to the Royal Niger Company (RNC), granting the company control of more than 500,000 square miles of territory. This outcome enabled the company to undertake treaties with rulers across the north and middle belt, notably with Sokoto and Gwandu, and to draw Britain into greater potential obligations in
the region. It also provided opportunities for concentration of economic control in the hands of the RNC in association with a couple of other companies, and began to choke off opportunities to African entrepreneurs who had been very active and profitable prior to this stage. So, as Bade Onimode has concluded:

The mechanisms of colonialism in Nigeria centred around the colonial state and economy. They included military conquest and political coercion through British monopoly of the colonial state apparatus, the manipulation of this political power for unequal trade, capital import, cultural penetration through Christianity and colonial education, as well as the dissemination of the British "illusion of the colonial epoch."21

The Royal Charter was withdrawn in December 1899, prior to the declaration of formal colonial control. Three large companies became preeminent in Nigerian business and import/export trade, retaining a virtual monopoly until independence. They were the former RNC, now known as the United Africa Company (UAC), which, as part of Unilever, alone controlled 40 percent of trade; the Compagnie Française de l’Afrique Occidentale (CFAO); and the Société Commerciale de l’Ouest Africain (SCOA). The smaller trading companies tended to be Syrian, Lebanese, or Greek, much as in many other neighboring states; and, again, this was a trend lasting into postindependence.

Cocoa, palm oil, groundnuts (peanuts), and tin were the principal export commodities of the country during the colonial period. In the north, cotton was also an important commodity. These exports were important to provide a tax base for the country and to pay for the consumer goods being imported. Under the terms of the 1912 West African Currency Board, a balance of trade had to be maintained, requiring a strong export trade to cover import costs. Railways and roads were built to facilitate the extraction of these commodities rather than to provide a service to Nigerian citizens. The Lagos-to-Ibadan railway, started in 1896, was completed in 1900 and helped increase trade between the two areas. Sir Percy Girouard, the governor between 1907 and 1909, was an engineer brought in specifically to supervise construction of railway extensions to Ilorin, Kaduna, Zaria, and Kano. The line to Kano was finished in 1913, and the eastern railway system was completed in 1926, linking Port Harcourt, Enugu, and Maiduguri. The first air service to Europe was established in 1936, via Khartoum.22

In contrast to the situation in eastern and southern Africa, European settlers were not encouraged to come to Nigeria to help with production and management. The colonial government, despite constant pressure, resisted requests to allow plantation agriculture. Cocoa remained an important export commodity throughout the colonial period and into the early 1960s; but then falling world prices brought economic malaise to the western growing region, contributing to that region’s political crisis.

Unlike the trading companies in settler colonies such as Kenya or Rhodesia, where white farmers supplanted African farmers from premium areas, Nigeria’s large companies had little option but to support the expansion of peasant produc-
tion. However, European control of the market left little room for African capital accumulation or entrepreneurial development. There was also little doubt as to whose benefit was being served by colonialism, inasmuch as infrastructural, educational, and health conditions for the majority of the people were only marginally improved. (The spiritual well-being of those in the south, especially, was of some interest to missionaries, however.) By 1939, Nigeria was in poor economic shape, carrying such a debt that the country “was not in a position to expand, progress, or even stand still.” World War II accentuated the subservient role of colony to metropole as greater demands were placed on the colonies to help the European war effort in terms of both human and physical resources. Nigeria played an important role by shipping foodstuffs and exporting tin to Britain.

The cost of World War II to Britain was enormous, and the colonies were called on to help restore some financial balance to the mother country after its end. To facilitate this goal, control of commodities in the postwar boom market was placed in the hands of various commodity boards. These boards were mandated to buy products from farmers at below world market rates and to control the sale and export of each particular commodity. The scheme was partially defended as providing guaranteed prices and markets for producers, but in actuality it created huge sterling revenues that could be “loaned” to Britain to assist capital growth and reconstruction with very low rates of interest payback to Nigeria. At the same time, domestic industry was stifled and Nigeria was forced to import manufactured goods. Again, the result was that African indigenous capital development remained stunted.

The British government acknowledged this problem in the industrial sector and recognized the consequences. “Nevertheless,” according to the Annual Report on Nigeria, “the absence of any large-scale African capital in this field of endeavour is very disappointing, and until it is forthcoming, progress cannot be really significant.” But, as Basil Davidson maintains, “progress” was not the intention:

Generally, the colonial systems aimed successfully at taking wealth out of Africa: by means of cheap mining labour; by paying prices to export crop farmers that were lower than prices on the world market; and by controlling all big business. They brought in modern technology, but they transferred to Africans no technical skills of any importance. They did not modernise Africa’s means of production and trade. They produced no industrial revolution; nor did they have any wish or interest to introduce one.

A Nigeria Local Development Board was established in 1946 to assist indigenous business ventures, and it was decentralized in 1949 into four boards in Lagos and the east, west, and north. These boards had some success in promoting African entrepreneurship, but in the heady atmosphere of the 1950s “the lending decisions of the Regional Loan Boards were frequently influenced by political considerations.” Also in place was a National Development Plan drawn up by the colonial authorities, as well as numerous regional and local plans. The National Development Plan was as much about politics as economics and ar-
guably may have been used as "a token to bribe the increasingly militant nationalist movement."²⁸

The role of the marketing boards changed after 1954, when constitutional restructuring brought more distinct regional political entities to the forefront. Each of the three regions had a primary commodity produced almost exclusively there: In the northern region, it was groundnuts; in the western region, cocoa; and in the eastern region, palm oil. In 1954, the regionalized commodity boards had inherited surpluses worth £87 million and were allowed to continue to generate significant income through maintenance of price control structures paying farmers far below world prices. Most important, the regional governments themselves were able to keep these surpluses and used them to finance not only development schemes within their regions but also patronage and regionally based political parties active in preindependence politics.

The commodity boards, then, proved to be useful bureaucratic instruments of taxation and shaped the character of the emergent regional governments. They were a major source of revenue on which patronage channels were developed, and they accentuated tensions between regions and ethnic groups, thereby splitting the nationalist movement into fairly distinctive regional blocs. As a result, the development of class consciousness was undermined, exaggerating the role and nature of ethnicity. This pattern of political economy would prevail until after independence, when oil exploration and production (actually initiated in the 1950s) began to provide sizable revenue, and when the civil war after 1967 dramatically altered the country's political character.

Decolonization and Independence

World War II had a significant impact on the relationship between Nigeria and Britain. In addition to economic changes there were tremendous social changes that occurred in the colony as Nigerian troops were shuttled off to fight overseas in Ethiopia (1940–1941) and Burma (1944), only to return home with changed attitudes and objectives. Agitation for independence heightened considerably, influenced also by nationalist successes across Africa and Asia. The demographic vulnerability of the British colonial force in Nigeria became more greatly exposed, and internal self-government and moves toward independence were considered the only viable options open to colonial authorities to pursue.²⁹

There had been indications of a significant change of policy even before the war. In 1939 the Colonial Office had initiated a study of the political forces in Africa and of ways to respond to them. In the same year the governor, Sir Bernard Bourdillon, had divided the south administratively into eastern and western regions and hinted at the movement toward federalism and greater Nigeriанизation of government positions. The change to a Labour government in Britain in 1945 accelerated the political pressures for reform. In Nigeria, changes came fairly quickly. In 1946 the governor, Sir Arthur Richards, introduced a new constitution
that attempted to tackle the thorny problem of the dissimilarity of Nigeria's regions. Some devolution of power was passed to the regions, including the creation of regional assemblies with representatives selected by native authorities and an additional House of Chiefs for the northern region. The primary tasks of these assemblies were selection of the representatives to sit on the Legislative Council, consideration of issues referred to them by the governor, and approval of their region's budget.

Although the central government's Executive Council remained much the same after 1946 as it had been before the war, membership of the Legislative Council was extended to include twenty members elected from the regional assemblies. The governor, however, still held ultimate decisionmaking authority. These constitutional changes were challenged by nationalist politicians not only because they were frustrated at not being consulted about them but also because they remained somewhat frozen out of the political structures. It was the traditional chiefs and elders, rather than the politicians, who continued to be treated as the primary representatives of African opinion. These circumstances also increased tensions between Igbo and Yoruba "nationalists."

The arbitrary introduction of the Richards constitution in 1946 antagonized the NCNC and prompted the party to raise funds to send a delegation to London to lobby for change. During intensive campaigning throughout Nigeria, Macauley died at the age of eighty-two, and Azikiwe succeeded him as president of the NCNC. Little specific gain resulted from the pressure against colonial authorities and the London government, but it did force a reconsideration of policy and an awareness of the need for consultation over a new constitutional framework. Sir John MacPherson became governor in 1948 and established intensive negotiations at all levels. Then, in 1950, a general constitutional conference was held in Ibadan comprising fifty-three delegates, fifty of whom were Nigerian. The conference recommended a new constitution that would increase autonomy for the regions, provide larger legislatures, and give Nigerians more say in government. These recommendations were incorporated into the new constitution of 1951.30

The political climate within Nigeria reflected what amounted to the hardening of regional rivalries, or "tribal nationalism" as this historical development has been called. The NCNC faced growing opposition within the western region from the majority Yoruba. Chief Obafemi Awolowo had begun to focus Yoruba ethnic sentiment in 1947 with the creation of the Yoruba Cultural Organization (Egbe Omo Oduduwa). The Action Group (AG) established in April 1951 as the political wing of that organization would eventually become a major player in both regional and national politics. Jealousy and fear of perceived (and, in fact, real) Yoruba advantages in business and education had earlier led to massive educational campaigns and missionary assistance across the east, contributing to a strong Roman Catholic presence in Igboland.

In the north, political activity and nationalism had been minimized by the controlling and conservative influence of the emirate system, as well as by indirect
rule. Prior to 1949 all nationalist activity in the north had been organized by southerners. Indirect rule had tended to stifle modern democratic development and the *talakawa*, or common people, had little or no channel of political expression. Northerners were also distanced from the rapid political and social changes occurring in the south. Such a likelihood had been foreseen in the 1930s by Governor Sir Donald Cameron, but northern-based colonial officials had succeeded in shielding the north from change, much to its later detriment. Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first federal premier and a leading northern region politician, criticized indirect rule in these terms: “The Chiefs had . . . no well-defined place and no one in the hierarchy knew his rights, obligations or powers. The people, on the other hand, were still ruled by might and little effort was made to win their confidence either by the black superiors or white officials.”

This situation was altered somewhat in 1949 by the establishment of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), a party exclusively for northerners that developed out of the Bauchi Improvement Association and the northern social organization known as Jam’iyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA). Senior members of the NPC were Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (the Sardauna of Sokoto) and Tafawa Balewa, both of whom would hold top positions in postindependent Nigeria. The overall conservatism and elitism of the NPC was obvious: During the 1959 election, one in five NPC candidates elected was a son of an emir. Nine years earlier, in 1950, the NPC’s disdain for change had quickly spawned a radical dissident party, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), which revolved around the leadership of Mallam Aminu Kano.

The 1951 MacPherson constitution helped construct the regionalist philosophy that was to become a solid, even permanent feature of Nigerian political life. Political parties were confirmed as regionalist rather than nationalist in orientation, and regional legislatures were created in the northern, western, and eastern regions. The north and west had assemblies composed of members through indirect election as well as a House of Chiefs, whereas the east maintained a single legislature. The NPC and NCNC dominated the northern and eastern governments respectively, but the western region was home to severe rivalry between the AG and NCNC. Although this constitutional framework helped to provide greater regional autonomy in handling issues concerning local government, health, agriculture, and education, problems remained in the running of central government. The center still remained dominant in matters of government, but it was not a “responsible” body because representatives were appointed (rather than elected) and control of policy was not in the hands of the political parties. Tensions occurred because parties remained regional rather than national in scope and so did not exert much influence over the affairs of the central government.

In 1953 the AG called for Nigerian self-government by 1956, a call that the north opposed. In the words of Ahmadu Bello, for the North this was an “invitation to commit suicide,” given its inability to compete on any plane with the south. This opposition led to fierce tensions in the federal parliament and to vitri-
olic attacks on the NPC by the southern press. In turn, these tensions contributed to the 1953 Kano riots, which pitted Hausa against Igbo and Yoruba. Conferences were held in July–August 1953 and January–February 1954 to discuss these issues, and another constitution was promulgated on 1 October 1954, this one named after U.K. Secretary of State Oliver Lyttleton.

The latter constitution unambiguously cemented the trend toward federalism in Nigeria. The civil service was regionalized with a separate service remaining to run the federal government. The three regions gained substantial autonomy in their own affairs, whereas Lagos and southern Cameroon became federal territory under the full control of the federal government. Direct elections to a federal house were instituted, with half of the seats allocated to the northern region and most of the remaining seats divided equally between the eastern and western regions. Each region retained a distinctive electoral mechanism: The east had universal suffrage; the west, taxpayers' suffrage; and the north, an electoral college. Members were no longer able to serve at both the regional and national levels. A federal premier was selected by the governor from the party or coalition controlling the federal house. Until 1966, this premier was consistently a northerner.

The watershed year in federalism, then, was 1954. The central government maintained control of foreign relations, defense, police, and transport, whereas most other policy was formulated at the regional level. The regions themselves developed economic development programs that provided foreign relations policies of their own, which sometimes ran counter to the federal government's—although this situation became more apparent after independence. The strength of the dominant parties within their own regions (with the possible exception of the AG, which faced an intransigent Igbo minority in the west), reinforced by the emerging political identities of those regions, led to severe rifts within the nationalist movement. Competition by these regionalist parties for control of the federal center heightened the existing bitterness and mistrust.

Divisions were apparent at all levels and continued to shift in complex patterns: within the western region, between the western and eastern regions, and, more generally, between the north and south. Politicians in the south demanded independence from Britain, whereas those in the north had to be warned by the British that independence was coming. Both the eastern and western regions gained internal self-government in August 1957, but the north postponed its own until March 1959. Southerners were opposed to the apparent northern dominance in their affairs (in terms of demographic strength translated into political influence), a dominance that the British government seemed happy to perpetuate. Northerners, in turn, felt that southerners were directly threatening their way of life. By 1959, 90 percent of school enrollment was in the south. Although the north apparently possessed half the country's total population, only 41 of the country's 883 secondary schools were located there. Furthermore, the majority of top civil service and army and police positions were occupied by southerners, and large segments of Nigerian business were controlled from the south.
Indeed, interregional suspicion, mistrust, and hostility dominated virtually everyone’s thinking in the preindependence era, contributing to perhaps as much apprehension as anticipation in the run-up to independence. Some assumed that federalism might prove to be the answer, “but a highly centralized Nigeria, on the other hand, could only come about by one of two developments, a dictatorship of the South, or of the North.”

But it was not just ethnic rivalries between the dominant Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba groups that held important political consequences. The relationship between these dominant groups and minority ethnic groups within the regions was also fraught with difficulty. The British authorities had established a Minorities Commission in 1957 to consider the complaints of smaller groups who considered themselves subjugated by the larger groups. At the final constitutional/independence conference in London in September–October 1958, the British government acknowledged that there were justified grievances; yet, despite significant lobbying by minorities, it decided not to alter the existing federal structure of Nigeria. The unrest among minority ethnic groups enabled political parties from outside each region to make inroads through partnerships with dissident groups, thus exacer-bating tensions between the dominant groups. Ahmadu Bello gave an impression of the dismissive attitude toward these groups when, in reference to the minorities issue, he commented that “I have given this problem the closest consideration for years and am forced to the conclusion that there is nothing in it beyond the personal aggrandisement of its leaders and a desire to embarrass us.”

The 1958 conference set the date for independence at 1 October 1960. Federal elections held in December 1959 gave victory to the NPC-NCNC coalition, with the northern party retaining its position as the senior partner. The north again received the same number of seats as the east and west combined. Of the 312 seats contested in the federal house, the NPC won 142; the NCNC/NEPU coalition, 89; the AG, 73; and the independents, 8. As the NPC’s leader, Ahmadu Bello, preferred to hold the northern premiership, his deputy, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was designated federal premier. Although tensions between groups remained high and the legacies of colonialism were still significant, there was no sense among politicians at independence that this new framework of government would come under pressure so great as to cause it to succumb to a military coup d’état in January 1966. Let us now turn to a consideration of those colonial legacies.

The Legacies of Colonization

One could easily make a case for saying that every aspect of postindependent Nigeria has been influenced by colonization in some way or another. The British helped to shape the country’s identity and physical characteristics, provided its capital of Lagos (although Abuja replaced the latter in 1991), gave Nigerians a common language for official communication—and a neutral one in the interethnic strife—and supplied a pattern of political institutions modeled after Westminster upon departure. Beyond these broad legacies, more specific ele-
ments can also be identified. Independent Nigeria inherited the Railway Corporation, the Coal Corporation, the Electricity Corporation, and the Produce Marketing Boards. In addition, it received a slice of the British West Africa Airways, which the federal government turned into Nigeria Airways.

It is evident that more than two hundred years of trading contact and some sixty years of direct colonial rule would leave lasting legacies affecting the character of independent Nigeria. Five interrelated legacies are described here as a way of explaining the critical issues of postindependent Nigeria. This list of legacies is by no means exclusive, and, for that matter, some are stronger and more residual than others. But all serve to shape in some notable way the Nigerian state and society, though not to the exclusion of indigenous Nigerian factors. That balance of African and European influences on postindependent society is a difficult one to judge.

First, the consensual decolonization exercise introduced (via treaty) a Westminster parliamentary system of government closely modeled on Britain's, albeit in federal form. Although there was strong nationalist agitation for independence, at no time did it turn violent or unruly against the colonizers, as occurred in other British colonies like Kenya or Zimbabwe and in Portuguese colonies like Angola or Mozambique. This smooth transition brought a "new" political model to the country in terms of a parliamentary system with a "loyal" opposition and other refinements of British politics, rather than generating a system of government more aligned with traditional African norms and values.

As occurred elsewhere in anglophone Africa, this system would fail in Nigeria very quickly. Its demise might readily be traced back to the first military coup in January 1966, but in reality the Westminster model was doomed within months of its inception. British misplaced confidence that its model of government could so easily be transposed to Africa is partly to blame for the legacy of unstable government, although other indigenous factors also came into play.

Second, the unraveling of the political structure was caused in large measure by the interregional and interethnic tensions prevalent in the country after independence—tensions seemingly encouraged during the latter years of colonial rule. It needs to be repeated that Nigeria was a completely artificial creation with quite disparate ethnic groups forced to share a common territory. Although the point can be argued, one might say that differing educational and administrative structures pursued by colonial authorities within the regions helped to foster divisions between ethnic groups and led to direct, violent competition between them in the 1950s and 1960s.

There is some truth to the suggestion that the breakup of the regions into increasingly smaller state units—a total of thirty-six in 1997—has reduced the bitter struggle between the dominant ethnic groups that was present at independence. Yet residual rivalry and competition among Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba continue to shape the political landscape. As Alex Gboyega recently concluded:

No matter into how many states the original three have been subdivided, the tripartite regionalization effected by the colonizer with its imposed ranking has provided
the basis for identity, conflict, and order in independent Nigeria. These units are not ethnic but rather “super-ethno-regional” constructions whose longevity is ensured by the fact that they have become competing teams. Along with cheering fans, they fight for the trophy, both symbolic and tangible, of the right to rule.40

The failure by Britain to deal with the issue of minorities’ rights in the late 1950s also exacerbated political tensions between dominant and smaller ethnic groups that, to this day, continue to undermine national political stability—the creation of new states notwithstanding. The region of Nigeria most “Europeanized” and “prepared” for challenges of modern democratic governance and the most influenced by European economic practices was the western one; yet it appears to have gained the least from independence. And the most sheltered and least prepared group of people for independence (by their own admission) were the Hausa-Fulani; yet through demographic strength they acquired the mantle of government and expect to maintain it in perpetuity. Even without hindsight it seems clear that this British-influenced exaggeration of ethnicity was fraught with tension and impending disaster, and that the British desire to “protect” the north seen consistently throughout the colonial period was a key element in bringing about the downfall of the First Republic.

Third, the impact of colonialism on traditional African society and leadership structures, combined with the experiences of authoritarian colonial rule, led to difficulties in defining the future role of traditional rulers. Although traditional political systems varied significantly across Nigeria, there was an element of consensus and shared decisionmaking in local government that was swept aside in the more competitive and combative system of the colonial era. Colonization’s undermining of traditional rule left open an important question as to whether traditional leaders could ever reclaim their authority. Political power had gradually been gained by lawyers, doctors, and journalists who were increasingly ambivalent about the voice of traditional authority—a development of particular concern in the northern emirates.41

Although Britain prided itself on the “fairness” of its administration, it still ruled through power and subjugation. Autocracy provided little experience of democracy. Granted, the political process in the 1950s was loose enough to provide some experience of democracy, but the British government maintained ultimate authority to exert its will. The fact that the “nationalists’ classroom was often the colonial jail” certainly influenced postindependence political values. Intolerance of opposition developed alongside fierce interethnic rivalries, quickly becoming a standard feature of political life and undermining the political system as well as the civil rights of Nigerians.

Colonial Nigeria also failed to develop “civic pride.” Respect for and attachment to the state of Nigeria was much weaker than corresponding sentiments for one’s ethnic group and regional government. Political activity in the 1950s had contributed little to building cohesion within the Nigerian nation ready for independence. This ambiguity and hostility—perhaps even mutual exclusivity—be-
tween state and region, nation and ethnic group, and, at times, clan and clan made it extremely difficult to create and maintain "national unity." In fact, one could argue that "unity" was absent from the nationalist struggle for independence. Consequently, support for the Nigerian state was lukewarm at best, and there was little evidence of any "civic pride" to maintain it. In short, the collapse of the First Republic, the military coups, and the subsequent civil war hardly seem surprising.

Fourth, the role of the political and commercial elites had been strongly conditioned by the experience of colonial rule, and their behavior after independence reflected those influences. Perks for colonial administrators, such as car and housing allowances and high salaries, were readily taken over by Nigerian bureaucratic and political elites. New opportunities for rapid promotion and easy enrichment opened up quickly with the withdrawal of the colonial power, and corruption across many segments of society, combined with the lack of accountability, became a critical issue. Enrichment would come through control of public office rather than in productive work. Regionalism merely exacerbated these trends as each regional elite tried to bolster its position vis-à-vis competitor elites in other regions. Perhaps even the fear of other ethnic groups was used as a diversionary tactic to shift attention away from the corrupt actions of one's own leadership. Whatever lessons British administrators had tried to pass on in terms of probity do not appear to have found fruitful soil in Nigeria.

Fifth, and finally, the colonial legacy bequeathed to the Nigerian economy was substantial. The lack of indigenous investment for development occurred because of the way the economy was managed during colonialism, a circumstance that changed only slowly in the early years after independence. In the wake of minimal industrial and infrastructural development, much was left to be accomplished during the First Republic and through to the present day. Close links were maintained with European (primarily British) businesses, thereby perpetuating links seen as neocolonialist and stunting indigenous influence within the economy. Indigenization decrees in the 1970s accelerated Nigerian involvement in the management of the economy, but economic problems in the 1980s and structural adjustment policies sought to reopen the economy to strong foreign influence. Needless to say, the ongoing alliance of politicians and business leaders seemed relatively unconcerned with bringing true development to the majority of Nigerians. The glaring inequalities between rich and poor, though apparently mitigated by the impact of oil in the 1970s, were accentuated by the collapse of the economy and the middle class in the 1980s and 1990s.

These factors and others reflect the major legacies that influenced the transition from colonialism to independence. It is impossible to isolate a specific time period during which this transition occurred, and yet there is a strong case to be made that Nigeria still has not gained its economic independence in the 1990s. Still, these legacies provide some basis for explaining issues that were to arise in the years after independence and so provide a useful introduction to the discussions found in subsequent chapters.
Notes

5. Clapperton died near Sokoto in 1827. One of the older government housing areas in Sokoto contains a road that bears his name, and it was along this road that the present author lived for a short time.
6. Crowther's grandson was Herbert Macaulay, leader of the Nigerian nationalist movement from the 1920s until his death in 1946. This example provides a good illustration of the linkage between missionary activity and political/economic development.
7. Historians continue to debate the reasons for the conquest of the West African region, as well as the actual importance of trade to that momentum. For more detailed discussions of the trade issue, see A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa (London: Longman, 1972), and P.T. Bauer, West African Trade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).
8. In terms of nomenclature, the Germans apparently believed that Cameroon was an indigenous name. In actuality, however, it had been adapted by the British from the Spanish Camerones, which in turn traces back to the Portuguese Rio dos Camaroes, meaning “river of prawns.” See A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, Adamawa: Past and Present (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 79.
14. Captain C.W.J. Orr, The Making of Northern Nigeria (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 125. Debate continues as to whether Lugard’s military background limited his thinking to the option of forcible occupation, and as to what other options might have been available to him.
16. Most colonial officials dealing with Nigeria were male, but influential females were also involved in policy, including Mary Kingsley, Flora Shaw, and Margery Perham, as well as “invisible” women in many areas of colonial life. For insights on the roles played by these women, see Helen Callaway, Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria (London: Macmillan, 1987).
17. By 1955, there were sixty different Treasuries in the north to collect taxes, highlighting the devolution of power across the region.
27. Falola, *Development Planning and Decolonization in Nigeria*.
32. The NEPU would later change its name to the Nigerian Elements Progressive Union.
37. Ahmadu Bello, *My Life*, pp. 215–216. Ken Saro-Wiwa had a different perspective on this period, saying that “[w]hile the British ruled Nigeria, the minorities felt relatively safe but as Nigeria moved towards independence, it became fairly obvious that they were imperilled and that they would have to do something to save themselves.” See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (Port Harcourt: Saros, 1992), p. 20.
This chapter attempts a broad exploration and explanation of the puzzling and complex elements of Nigerian identity, society, and nation. Initially, it analyzes the layering of attachments—sometimes complementary, sometimes competing—to nuclear family, extended family, village, clan, ethnic group, region, and nation. It also addresses the issue of religion, considering the often tense relationship between Christian and Muslim communities within Nigeria. The chapter then examines the central role of political and military elites in shaping the character of the political game and the nation itself. Some of the major issues relating to civil society are discussed next, with a focus on how they have influenced or been influenced by divisions inherent within the country. Examined in this context are such topics as the census and state creation, intellectuals and the universities, the media, social class, and gender.

Foundations of Society

Ethnicity and Identity

Ethnicity is seen to arise “when relations between ethnic groups are competitive rather than co-operative. It is characterised by cultural prejudice and socio-economic and political discrimination. . . . It is a phenomenon linked directly or indirectly to forms of affiliation and identification built around ties of real or putative kinship.” The sensitivity of ethnic identity was acknowledged and possibly understood by successive colonial authorities as they attempted to count and control the various “tribes.” By the 1950s, those authorities had concluded that a fed-
eral system would serve best to accommodate many of the concerns about ethnicity, whereas the possibility of aggravating them was downplayed. It is important to note that ethnic attachments are far older than loyalties to the state of Nigeria. Language, custom, geography, and traditional rule all link to those ethnic sentiments. Life in colonial Nigeria did little to disrupt those fundamental associations, and may even have strengthened them.

At the beginning of colonial rule, there was less strident ethnic self-identification than became the norm in later years. People were less likely to identify themselves as Hausa or Igbo or Tiv or Ijaw, although broad distinctions between such groups would have been recognizable. They were much more likely to identify themselves with their extended family, village, or clan, which varied from region to region. The north, because of the unifying characteristics of Islam, was more likely than other regions to adhere to ethnic/regional identification.

As the colonial period unfolded, such identification became more apparent and intrinsic in the divisions within the country. Ethnicity began to be a critical indicator in political organization, employment, and education, and was increasingly referred to as the factor dividing “us” from “them” in the bitter arenas of regional and national politics. Within each regional government a large ethnic group dominated political life to the detriment of numerous minority groups. As Eghosa Osaghae concluded, “Regionalization was the cradle of ethnic minority problems in Nigeria,” problems that are far from resolved today. English became the single “official” language, avoiding problems of recognizing indigenous languages, a status it still has today.

Improved communications and transport made ethnic mobility more possible, thus bringing groups into closer proximity than ever before. The Igbo, struggling with a high population density and poor agricultural soils in the eastern region, became the most likely to migrate; and, indeed, they set up sizable Igbo communities, particularly across the north—most notably in the large Sabon Gari of Kano. These communities were able to live side by side for long periods of time, but when ethnic tension arose, as in 1953 and 1966, their proximity provided a tinder box for ethnic conflict. In this respect, the ethnic strife of the 1950s and 1960s would have seemed impossible a half-century earlier.

Colonial policies were predicated on the desire to maintain some equilibrium between the three largest ethnic groups at the expense of the minorities. Censuses required ethnic self-identification for counting purposes, even though colonial authorities admitted that ethnicity was a fluid concept. In the 1953 census, for example, the primary ethnic groups numbered as follows: 5,489,000 Hausa, 3,041,000 Fulani, 5,485,000 Igbo, and 5,047,000 Yoruba. The numerical strength of the Hausa-Fulani (even though women in the north were not allowed to vote until 1979) gave the north ascendancy over the other regions, much to the latter’s unease.

But this political structure did little to assist the ethnic minorities who constituted more than 40 percent of the total population. Large middle-belt groups such as the Tiv, who numbered 773,000, had little meaningful representation in
the north—a situation that caused serious problems. We have already seen in Chapter 2 how the NPC leader, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, dismissed the claims of these groups. The British government, in the final preparation for Nigerian independence during the 1958 constitutional conference, appeared sympathetic to these minority sentiments but did not provide a political outlet for them. The Tiv riots in 1960 and 1964, for example, were not solely about ethnicity; they also reflected the Tiv’s refusal to accept incorporation in the northern region under the dominance of the Hausa-Fulani leadership.

By the 1960s, then, ethnicity appeared to be the primary determinant of political life, undermining a wider attachment to the concept of Nigeria. But ethnic identity remained a complex element as there were multiple levels of identification possible, and such identification depended on the issue at hand. For example, on some issues there might have been a call to a Yoruba ethnicity, whereas on other issues the frame of reference might have been a Yoruba subgroup, pitting different Yoruba factions against each other. Ideology and nascent class consciousness also influenced and undermined ethnicity, as in the north where Aminu Kano’s NEPU led some Hausa against the Hausa/NPC regional government, or in the western region where Awolowo’s socialistic leanings alienated other Yoruba. In addition, differing levels of education between regions inflamed
ethnic tensions, with perceived advancement or backwardness of groups creating a barrier between them.

Kenneth Post and Michael Vickers summed up this situation when they called Nigeria a "conglomerate" society, identifying diverse and complex pressures acting on the country. They also underlined the importance of these ethnic identifications:

So important were these identifications that at times they could override loyalty to Nigeria as a whole, or to one of its regions, dedication to the parliamentary process, respect for law and order and even for the sanctity of human life. It is in this sense that we would speak of a "primordial" loyalty here, as something demanding a total commitment transcending those to any other groups.6

If anything, the fledgling political structures of the First Republic were constructed in such a way as to try to absorb ethnic sympathies, at least those of the majority groups. This is not to say, however, that each ethnic group was a monolithic unit, as there were clear internal distinctions that need to be noted. But one could argue that for most Nigerians, even today, village and local life is all they know, and so attempts to "modernize" primordial cultural attachments and target them toward the abstract entity of the federal state, or along the lines of class consciousness, are difficult to accomplish.7

Immediately prior to the civil war, Yakubu Gowon attempted to defuse ethnic competition by creating twelve states out of what was four regions (the mid-west region had been created in 1964). The expansion of the number of states to thirty-six in 1996 has been seen as a way to control and give recognition to the ethnic diversity of the country. Of course, it is inconceivable that each of the 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria8 would get their own state, but appeasing the larger groups by giving them some autonomy over their own affairs through control of a state government apparatus has somewhat appeased ethnic identification and made it complementary to national identification.

Great efforts have been made to alter such primordial attachments, and to transfer them to the Nigerian nation. There is some evidence to suggest that minority groups have been more welded to the concept of Nigerian nationalism than the large groups who perhaps perceive that there are other alternatives.9 Appointment of officials on the basis of "federal character" has been important to the provision of widespread ethnic representation at the federal level, to the extent that during the Second Republic the constitution required at least one cabinet minister from each state. Unfortunately, federal character has often been implemented via ethnic quotas (e.g., in university placement) and, "far from leading to national unity, had engendered more inter-ethnic bitterness as various ethnic factions of the ruling classes accused one another of reaping undue advantages from it."10 In May 1973 Gowon introduced the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) through which recent university graduates were to be sent to different parts of Nigeria to help the citizenry and supposedly weaken ethnic stereotypes.
Unfortunately, much less has been done to change loyalties at the local and state levels. In fact, localized recruitment of state indigenes for positions in many state governments has perhaps intensified interstate rivalries to the detriment of federal unity. The military has been a critical element in nation building within its ranks, attempting somewhat successfully to engineer a genuine “national” army, although serious ethnic divisions remain within the military today. And during periods of civilian rule, rhetorical emphasis has been placed on national rather than regional politics.

Evidence that has surfaced in recent years indicates that ethnicity is again of significant political importance in Nigeria, despite efforts to minimize its impact on political life. This observation resonates with evidence from other, similar countries, leading to the suggestion that, “[a]rguably, the reassertion of communal identity may be the result of the alienation and frustration that accompany the decline of artificial states.”

Ethnic identification was prohibited from the 1991 census.

Ethnic tensions have allegedly been fomented by the Abacha regime to weaken the Ogoni in their claims against the federal government by pitting neighboring groups against them, as well as to weaken the support for Chief Abiola across the country by portraying him as a Yoruba sectionalist. Ethnic unrest within the Yoruba has also continued; as a result of violence in Osun state in August 1997, for example, at least sixty-five people were killed.

Ethnicity continues to be a primary mechanism for raising support for aspiring candidates. Sam Nolutshungu’s warnings remain valid today: “Once one party opts for ‘tribalism’ or ethnic chauvinism, it becomes rational for any would-be rival to define and consolidate an ethnic base. . . .Whilst the outcome may be catastrophic for all concerned, no party can abstain from using ethnic strategies for fear of losing out to the ethnic mobilisation of an opponent.” Furthermore, there is evidence that structural adjustment programs and the harsh economic conditions have inflamed ethnic sentiments. Nigeria’s experience of ethnicity is by no means unique; indeed, ideas about conflict resolution and consociational forms of government that have been drawn from an analysis of other countries offer hope of a resolution of Nigeria’s ethnic crises.

With the end of the Cold War and the democratization efforts that have taken place across the continent, it has become (somewhat) acceptable to question the territorial construction of states. Why should Nigeria remain a federal state? Are its people more overwhelmingly Nigerian in spirit today than they were in 1960? It is unlikely that Nigeria will change its external borders in the foreseeable future, as indicated by the overwhelming desire of citizens to maintain this national unity. However, the cut and thrust of ethnic competition, the issue of minority rights, and the creation of new states within the federation are certain to continue.

Religion and Society

External religious influence on Nigeria has been an important feature for more than a thousand years. The spread of Islam across the Sahara Desert and adjacent
savanna lands was reinforced by trade caravans and links to Morocco, Egypt, and Sudan. The revival of Islam under the leadership of Usman Dan Fodiyo in the early 1800s spread Islam across the north and led to its expanding influence in Yorubaland. There it came head to head with missionary Christian influence (which had been sporadic prior to that period) and then, from the 1840s onward, extended into the south.

It is difficult to gain accurate statistical data on the relative size of religious groups in Nigeria today, but the available information does appear to reflect these historical influences. Estimates suggest that Muslims number 47 percent of the population, Christians 34 percent, and Animists 18 percent. Islam is the predominant religion of the north; Christianity characterizes the south (with Catholicism prevalent in the east); and there are interesting overlaps in the west and middle belt. But this is an obvious simplification. Many Nigerians profess allegiance to an organized religion but still maintain the traditions and rituals of an indigenous practice. And in the west, specifically, the Yoruba are divided between Muslims and Christians, and possess a relatively relaxed view of religion and religious differences.15

Furthermore, these religions are considerably fractured, so there are numerous denominations and divisions within them. As Rosalind Hackett has observed, "The characterization of modern Nigeria as a nation with three religious traditions—Christian, Islamic and the traditional religions—is to simplify a highly complex and pluralistic religious situation."16 Hackett claims that in recent years 1,500 distinct religious movements have emerged in Nigeria, with interest and membership spurred on by the harsh economic conditions of life.

Mission schools in the south began to take root after the 1840s but rose to prominence as British colonial control was established. The mission school became the departure point for indigenous businesspersons and politicians, and was vital to the emergence of an educated, Western-oriented elite in the south.17 In the north, Muslims were perturbed at the growth of and inroads made by Christianity during colonial rule. As a result of such perceptions the Muslim north became determined to hold its ground and to reverse this trend in the postindependence period, whereas for many Christians "the crucial political issue of the period was to avoid domination by the Muslims in a future independent Nigeria."18

Religion has not proved to be a focal point of political life, but it has reinforced ethnic contentions. The north-south divide is often seen to rest on Muslim-Christian fault lines, but the real picture is much more complex. Large pockets of Christians in the north are paralleled by significant numbers of Muslims in the south. Neither the collapse of the First Republic nor the civil war could be entirely attributed to religion, although that was certainly one of the elements. On the whole, toleration of differences has been more noticeable than intolerance.19

Over the last decade or more, however, increasing radicalism and friction have occurred across the religious spectrum. In December 1980, 4,000–6,000 people were killed in Kano during an uprising by the followers of Maitatsine. Initially seen as a fundamentalist uprising against traditional Islam, this incident was later
understood as reflecting a brand of millenarianism that had shaken the country. At the time, reports in Kano put the death toll even higher as the federal government, controlled by the northern-based National Party of Nigeria (NPN), attempted to crush the movement.

Tensions between Christians and Muslims have been rising in recent years with numerous violent clashes between rival groups. A widespread assumption is that religion is being used for political gain and is being inflamed by economic hardships. In Kafanchan in 1987, hundreds died in clashes between Muslims and Christians, essentially beginning this period of tension between religious groups. In response, the Babangida government established a National Advisory Council for Religious Affairs to attempt to mediate these conflicts. However, in the following year riots broke at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), in Zaria, between Christian and Muslim students over the results of student elections. In 1991, hundreds more people were killed in disputes in Bauchi and Katsina.

For many Christians there is still the perception of an expansionist Islam against which they need to protect themselves. The fact that much of the destruction has been directed at Christian churches in the north confirms their beliefs. The country’s accession to membership of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986—a decision taken by only the Muslim members of the military government—also did little to assuage Christian fears, although membership was suspended in 1991. In short, religion has been politicized as a result of being perceived as part of the entrenchment of a northern Muslim elite in power that does not wish to devolve power to Christian southerners. Muslim academics have also been active in promoting the maintenance of Islam in the Nigerian state.

The Muslim establishment, however, has been in turmoil since 1988 following the death of Sultan Abubakar III, the Sultan of Sokoto. Sultan Abubakar’s fifty-plus years of leadership had a somewhat settling influence on the Muslim establishment, and his death proved to be a great loss. In a very controversial move, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki was confirmed as the new sultan, but popular protest against this outcome was widespread. An attempted coup in April 1990 sought the replacement of the sultan as one of its aims, but Dasuki survived in office until he was ousted by Abacha in April 1996 and replaced by a more pliant successor. Dasuki had earlier called for the recognition of the Abiola government, an action that did not endear him to Abacha.

The Christian bloc is loosely associated within the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which seeks to protect its members from unfair treatment. CAN has long lobbied for no further extension of the use of Sharia, or Islamic, law—for many years a bone of contention within the country and a difficult issue for all the postindependence constitutions. But Christians are themselves divided not only along traditional Protestant-Catholic lines but also into “new” denominations that are springing up to challenge more traditional churches. The latter number in the hundreds and include such denominations as the Celestial church,
the Aladura movement, God’s Kingdom Society, and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star.

With economic conditions in the country deteriorating for the majority, there has been a strong growth of interest in religion as well as “runaway inflation in the production of clergy,” although such godliness has not translated into a decline in crime. In addition, there are fears of greater intolerance of religious differences that could tear apart the society. As occurred during Babangida’s transition exercise, there were fears that Abacha’s transition program in 1997–1998 could become embroiled in religious factionalism, threatening not just the transition but the country itself. Partly in accordance with those fears, Catholic bishops in September 1997 called on Abacha to choose not to succeed himself and to respect the transition process and human rights.

To date, the tolerance of religious differences within society has been a sign of stability and maturity, but this situation could easily unravel. As Don Ohadike has written: “Nigerians must decide whether they want a theocratic state or a modern nation-state, whether they prefer religious revivalism to scientific and technological advancement in a modern world, and, above all, whether they prefer several independent countries, some Islamic and others Christian, to one strong multi-religious nation.”

Elites and Society

Political Elites

Nigeria’s ethnic groups have always contained social stratification within them, although the nature of such societal dynamics has changed over time. During the colonial period the least social stratification occurred among the Igbo, for whom authority was shared across the village level. In contrast, the north encompassed fairly rigid hierarchies, strengthened by British colonial policies. Although regional distinctions were noticeable, colonialism in general helped to perpetuate, and in some cases create, an identifiable political elite.

The term elite, though very difficult to explain and operationalize, is used here rather fluidly to designate a small group of people holding substantial political and economic influence at the regional and/or national level. During the immediate pre- and postindependence periods, tensions emerged as prospective members of the new elite jostled to grab the spoils from the outgoing colonizers. British rule had been autocratic and thus influenced the characteristics of the rule of the new elite. B.J Dudley argues that this transition was fatal for Nigerian society: “The rulings of the gods [i.e., British colonial authorities] are final, and are questioned only at dire personal and collective risk. It needs little argument to show that this is hardly the model to inculcate the tolerant, participant attitudes required for a parliamentary game such as was presumed to emerge from the transfer process.” And Ruth First, in a chapter aptly named “White Power, Black
Parody” in her classic book *The Barrel of a Gun*, highlighted the corruptibility of
the incoming elite as follows: [O]nce independence had been achieved, the elite
addressed itself single-mindedly to its interests. They had become heirs to a suc-
cessor state that they had, with few exceptions, little inclination to change. "They
had criticized not so much the system as its incumbents. With independence, they
were the incumbents." 29 In turn, the rule of the Nigerian elite became personal-
ized and autocratic, leaving little room for opposition or dissent. As Chinua
Achebe has concluded, “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure
of leadership.” 30

The composition of the political elite varied between the more traditional, hi-
erarchical rule found in the north to the regions in the south where a more “mod-
ern” political elite was taking shape from roles played in the nationalist struggle.
Colonial authorities tended to favor the former, especially in the north, but the
ballot box gradually shifted political power to the latter. This was an area of dis-
sension within the country at independence. The northern leadership was pri-
marily traditional, composed of emirs and other figures who owed their influence
to deference within northern society. In the south, although traditional rulers still
played important roles, by far the largest group within the elite comprised busi-
nesspersons, teachers, lawyers, and other professionals who had worked their way
through political parties to positions of authority. Thus the fabric and composi-
tion of the political elites differed by region.

Throughout the ten years that the civilian elite has controlled political life
(1960–1966 and 1979–1983), the record of service has been poor. There are justifi-
cations for this conclusion. A major problem has been the elite’s failure to apply
consistently a nationalist orientation to policy, instead promoting sectional or per-
sonal interests. This situation quite clearly pertained to both the NPC and the NPN
at the federal level during the two republics, but also to the other parties in regional
and state governments. As Julius Ihonvbere summed up: “The Nigerian bourgeo-
"class seems to have a legendary reputation for waste, inefficiency, corruption, indis-
"cipline, reliance on extralegal and irrational modes of political competition, and ac-
"cumulation through investment in politics and access to state power.” 31

Ethnic orientations have also been critical to maintenance of the patronage sys-
"tem within the economy. For example, as Richard Joseph points out, decentral-
"ized ethnic connections are important in the job sector inasmuch as those people
already employed are responsible for assisting unemployed people from their own
group in gaining employment—a concept he calls “prebendalism.” 32 This idea of
“enlightened trickle-down” has some merits, but one can criticize it by arguing
that many leaders serve their own personal interests when in office, such that little
distribution of benefits occurs. 33

The fact that the political class is not a unified group—although there are few
significant differences within the class—has had two major consequences: Politicians unashamedly play the ethnic card to maintain themselves in office, and
the chances that truly national parties will develop (most important, a party of
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socialism) have been undermined. As Dudley argues, "The educated elite had to draw on the language of primordialism and communal parochialism for the terms of political discourse." Elites have been able to spread fear of rival ethnic groups to maintain popular loyalty to themselves within their own ethnic group. Ethnic coalitions, where they occur, are brokered at the elite level.

Nigerian politics, then, has drawn more on personality and tribe than on policy and class, and parties expect members of the elite to "deliver" the votes within their own ethnic, clan, or village constituencies—just as these "ethnic intermediaries," in turn, are expected to deliver benefits to their constituents. Politicians who wish to appeal to national sentiments are invariably drawn back into an ethnic or regionalist perspective. This task has been made easier by the poor levels of education and literacy among the majority of voters, the continuing deference to the "big man," the fear of reprisals in open-ballot elections, the ease with which elections can be rigged, and the cash or in-kind incentives normally offered to voters for such compliance. "Democracy" easily gets pushed aside because "Nigeria's political class, like their supporters, may like democracy; but they like power and office and their spoils even more."

Another critical flaw has been the paucity of ethical standards among politicians while in office. Evidence of this problem can be seen in the manner in which governments have been run and elections fought, involving every type of malpractice imaginable. But another, albeit related and sensitive area of corruption requires further elaboration. Although it is true that corruption occurs in all societies (recall the "sleaze" and financial scandals in the United States and the U.K. in 1997), one can make the case that corruption in many African states occurs on a much larger and more damaging scale. Within Nigeria there is considerable debate about when the corruption there actually began. Colonial reports are replete with commentaries about the magnitude of corruption found in the country at the end of the nineteenth century and during the early twentieth century. Some of the malpractices involved may have been mistaken for social practices, although the dividing line between the two is sketchy at best.

Most commentators would agree that the fierce rivalry between regional political elites in the 1950s and the need to generate huge amounts of funding to contest elections led these elites to draw on the resources of their region and to deliberately blur the boundary between public and private funds. Colonial officials looked the other way as the pace of corruption accelerated. Now in office, these elites had to maintain a certain lifestyle and pay favors, and such behavior simply became standard practice. As B.A.T. Balewa has argued: "Once in power, the immediate concern seemed to be how to settle election debts and to get extra financial resources to perpetuate themselves in power. This was how political corruption set in, and as a consequence, discipline in all walks of life practically broke down."

The elite unashamedly used politics for private gain (a process often referred to as "extractive" politics), and such exploitation of the masses reached excessive proportions. As Dudley has noted: "For the Nigerian political elite, politics in-
volves not the conciliation of competing demands arising from an examination of the various alternatives entailed by any course of political action, but the extraction of resources which can be used to satisfy elite demands and to buy support.”40 Indeed, Gavin Williams and Terisa Turner have concluded that “[p]olitics thus comes to be the process of gaining control of public resources for the pursuit of private ends.”41 Ruth First has argued in a similar vein: “The politician-businessmen in office were intent on rapid acquisition and the manipulation of political controls for their patently personal economic ends.”42 And Alex Gboyega views corruption in terms of “fast-feeding frenzies,” whereby “[c]ivilian and military rulers and candidate rulers alike regard their incumbency as a turn at the trough, necessarily limited, assuredly enriching.”43

The poor record of the political class controlling the Second Republic indicates that corruption remained substantial during the 1980s. Much is made of the military’s effort to find an honest bunch of politicians to run the country after 1998. In fact, one of the key reasons proposed by the military for Nigeria’s failure to return to civilian rule since 1990 has been that the politicians who have offered themselves appear to be potentially no more honest than those of the Second Republic. Of course, the military itself is certainly not exempt from corruption (as discussed in the next section). One credible fear is that corruption could actually increase with the new group of civilians after 1998, because they may reason that they have only a few years in office during which to “extract” resources before the military again returns to power.

A common question is, Who’s to blame for the corruption? Did the British colonizers fashion the attitude? Or does it reside within Nigerians themselves? As with many complex questions, it is possible to argue either side with some conviction. Although the influences of the colonial period are strong, both Margaret Peil44 and Jean-François Bayart45 have argued that deeply imbedded cultural characteristics also play a significant role.46 After all, it was the obscene embezzlement of billions of naira that resulted in the description of Nigeria as the most corrupt country in the world in 1996 according to Transparency International, a Berlin-based NGO that monitors corruption.47

One section of the political elite that appears to have gradually lost influence since 1960 is the traditional leadership. During the First Republic, traditional chiefs had already lost much of their political influence, though less so in the more conservative northern region. Once military rule became a feature of life after 1966, the position of traditional rulers was weakened further. As William Graf points out, “The main directions of this struggle are evident: the ‘modernising’ elite, backed by the power of the state, has steadily managed, partly by co-optation, partly by coercion, and partly by structural reforms, to erode the formal powers and influence of the strictly ‘traditional’ rulers.”48 Traditional rulers have retained some status and are “consulted” on issues from time to time, but their status is more social than political. They retained little or no decisionmaking authority in the Second Republic or under successive military governments. However, their in-
fluence remains significant in terms of backing and organizing votes for political candidates and in terms of prestige among ethnic constituencies.

The privileged position of traditional leaders provides them with ample opportunities to mingle with other influential Nigerians to benefit in business. Consider, for instance, the so-called Kaduna mafia, an ill-defined group of business-traditional-military leaders who allegedly coordinate their activities in the Kaduna area and are often said to be influential in shaping the political and economic policy of northern leaders.49 Another interesting example of the continuing importance and status of traditional titles concerns Chief Moshood Abiola, whose 1993 presidential election “victory” was annulled by the military after he had gathered more than 200 chieftdom titles to gain legitimacy and votes in many parts of the country. Current military leaders of the Abacha regime are also collecting titles, supposedly to strengthen their position when the military withdraws from office.

Military Elites

Great energy has apparently been exerted by the Babangida and Abacha governments to find a new political class that is overtly honest and ethical, although this quest may be a deliberately elusive effort simply to perpetuate rule by a military elite. Observers point to the obvious irony that the military is not the agency best equipped to search for democrats: When it finds them, it has tended to throw them in jail. Recall that, since 1960, the military has held office for all but ten years. Its most stated justification for entering into politics is the civilian elite’s failure to maintain the political structure and act in accordance with “acceptable” norms. The military’s interventions in 1966, 1983, and 1993 did have some measure of popular support, but it was only regionalized and temporary.

Unfortunately, successive military elites have displayed massive corruption and obscene exploitation of society, drawing on the large revenues that the federal government controls from oil exports and on the patronage available through overseeing major construction contracts and foreign exchange allocations. The trend toward a community of millionaire generals in the 1970s has been maintained, if not enhanced, in the 1990s. Many believe that the outgoing military elite in 1979 only handed over power after receiving guarantees from the civilian elite not to probe into the military’s financial affairs. Likewise, it is widely assumed that the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections occurred partly out of the fear that radical SDP members would embarrass the military elite by probing into its financial affairs.

Although military control of society has not necessarily promoted development or provided an enviable model for the rest of society to emulate, sincere attempts have been made to build a truly “national” army for the country, especially after the trauma of the civil war. Recruitment and promotions have been attuned to the aspirations of “federal character,” and soldiers are continually posted
around the country so that they can attain greater awareness of other regions (and stop potential coup plotters from organizing). Training and discipline emphasize national rather than sectional goals, and what occurs among the military leadership is monitored closely by the rest of society. Of course, such intentions have been subverted by political intrigue. During the Shagari administration, for example, northerners were promoted over Yoruba to promote “federal character” but also to promote the northern political agenda.

At independence, only 10 percent of the officer corps of the Royal West Africa Frontier Force (RWAFF) was African, with British officers remaining in the majority. These figures were reversed by 1965, as Africanization brought quick promotions and the rapid withdrawal of British officers. The first Nigerian commander of the military was Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, who took the post in 1964. The size of the military grew from 7,500 troops in 1960 to 12,000 troops in 1966, and there were hopes that the process of Africanization would pacify the military. However, as J.F. Maitland-Jones concluded, “[i]f the constitution-makers gambled that the apolitical traditions of the British army coupled with hasty changes in the territorial balance of the officers would suffice to soothe growing tribal consciousness, then the gamble did not pay off.” Indeed, such a rapid change within the emerging elite of the armed forces intensified ethnic imbalance because a large share of initial promotions went to officers from the eastern region, an outcome that upset northerners. The NPC used a quota system (whereby 50 percent of officers were appointed from the south and 50 percent from the north), which served to increase the number of northern officers in the army from 14 percent of the total in 1961 to 21 percent by 1966, thus also politicizing the military.

Igbo officers’ growing frustration over blocked promotion prospects and the northern bias of the ruling NPC, combined with the eastern region’s inability to exert any influence over federal policies via the NCNC, contributed to one of the justifications for the country’s first military coup in January 1966. Few observers believed that a coup was likely, especially given the British training of the armed forces. As William Gutteridge commented about Nigeria in 1965, “In terms of influence on the affairs of state . . . the army is less likely to play a decisive role than [it is] in other new states.” But this stance disregards the views of an educated, ambitious officer corps, which was suffering “professional disorientation” (in Gutteridge’s words) because of rapidly changing events in the early 1960s. In addition, the military elite had been politicized by the 1964 political crisis, during which the rival president and prime minister had both called on the military to intervene, and by the Nigerian military’s direct involvement in the political stabilization of the Tanzanian government in 1964.

The coup, countercoup, and subsequent civil war changed the whole character, size, and ethos of the military as it expanded to 270,000 troops. In the 1970s some Igbo officers were reintegrated into the federal military, but a long period of isolation and ostracism for the Igbo elite was soon to begin: There was no Igbo officer in the Muhammadu Buhari government, and only one in the Ibrahim Babangida
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government. During this time, middle-belt officers came to prominence, including such leaders as Yakubu Gowon and, later, Babangida.53 In the 1990s, increasing tensions within the military brought attempted coups, reshuffles, and forced retirements as the strains of remaining in power tested the fragile coalition of interest. The attempted coup of April 1990 displayed radical opposition to the status quo, and the perpetrators called for the excision from the federation of the far northern states of Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto. At that point the coup leaders announced: “This is not just another coup but a well-conceived, planned and executed revolution for the marginalized, oppressed and enslaved peoples of the Middle Belt and the South with a view to freeing ourselves and children yet unborn from eternal slavery and colonisation by a clique of this country.”54

The general population’s increasing distaste for military government has added to the pressures against the government. In 1992 Babangida was alleged to have provided a new car to every army officer above the rank of captain in order to buy loyalty, at an estimated cost to the government of 500 million naira.55 In addition, Babangida developed an elite national guard consisting of some 12,000 troops stationed in Abuja for the government’s defense. And Abacha constantly rotates his officers and state governors and lives in seclusion at Aso Rock in Abuja. Overall, however, the actual size of the military is relatively small. In 1995, it numbered 89,000 troops, with a total expenditure of $813 million.56

Have the periods of military control of government brought any significant benefits to Nigeria? Despite the elite’s protestations to the contrary, military leadership has provided perhaps only marginal benefits.57 The military can exert unity of will on the country through force, can demand acquiescence in certain policies, and can try to inculcate a sense of national purpose within its ranks through work at its staff college at Jaji and other programs; but successive military leaders have not really led by shining example, and thirty years of military government have still left the country in a state of decay and chaos. The current military elite seems content to perpetuate its control, offering only a manipulated transition process to the country.

Class Consciousness and Social Control

Nigeria since independence has pursued an overtly capitalistic development strategy that has led to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. In a society of Nigeria’s complexity it is difficult to simplify internal class relations, but one could make a case for the growing inequality within society between a small elite group and the rest of society. At independence there was little class structure (in a Marxist sense) due in part to the paucity of African capital.58 The Communist Party had been banned by the colonial authorities in 1953. Since independence, the class structure has become more pronounced, although the ability to pursue politics on class-defined lines has remained circumspect. These
trends appear to have magnified during structural adjustment in the last decade, with a shrinking middle class further exposing the inequalities involved—prompting a serious indictment of development efforts over almost four decades.

The organization of labor goes back at least to the 1930s. A teachers’ union was established in 1931; a railway workers’ union, a year later; and a Trades Union Congress of Nigeria, in 1943. By 1946 there were a reported 102 unions representing 76,333 workers. And with the establishment of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in 1950, there were 149 unions representing 125,000. Since then the NLC has attempted to organize labor both economically and politically, but it has fallen short of fully achieving these goals and has been victimized by successive governments, both civilian and military. Regular detentions of the NLC’s leaders, combined with internal rifts, have sapped the unions’ energies and weakened its political impact. The NLC’s opposition to structural adjustment has not had much effect, and unemployment has led to declining membership. Moreover, the NLC was denied the opportunity to field its own candidates in the 1992–1993 transition, and the Abacha administration has been unwilling to grant the unions any leeway.

Compounding the weakness of the NLC is the fact that the vast majority of the Nigerian workforce remains rurally based in agriculture, with little or no representation and only a meager influence over political life. Coordination of the “farmers’ voice” has not occurred, and, in any case, rural dwellers often fall under the sway of traditional elites. Mobilizing such a workers’ vote or platform has never been realized, although “progressive” parties such as the Nigerian Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), the People’s Redemption Party (PRP), and the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) could arguably be said to have tried. As for the workers represented by the NLC, the opinion has been expressed that the majority are reluctant to be organized on a class basis, preferring the short-term goals of higher salaries to the vaguer promises of a classless society.

During the 1970s and early 1980s oil revenues and general economic strength and confidence provided for the development of a burgeoning middle class, and rising salaries (helped by the Udoji Awards of the mid-1970s) blunted the radical message of the NLC. As professional jobs increased in number so the middle class increased in size and buying power, bringing more consumable imports into the country and altering the consumption habits of many Nigerians. After the 1980s, however, the shrinking economy and structural adjustment severely squeezed the middle class; today, many of its members eke out the most basic of livings. The collapse of this middle echelon has revealed a stark contrast between the living styles and conditions of the minority and those of the majority. Large numbers of school leavers have swelled the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed, and the continuing high growth rate of the population combined with the faltering economy point to greater problems in this area in the future.

Class divisions, then, are very pronounced, but they have not proved to be the basis of political divisions to date. On the contrary, according to one observer,
the apparent absence of "class consciousness" has been "one of the fundamental reasons for the failure of labour and socialist movements in Nigeria." Rather than looking to cast their votes in class solidarity, the majority is still prompted to support members of the elite who tout ethnic allegiances as the critical determiner of values. Party leaders have deliberately exploited the ethnic card, not only to secure their own gain but also to reduce the likelihood that a national working-class party will emerge. Radical leaders espousing socialist and Marxist ideologies do exist, but they have found little support from the majority. From time to time many of those leaders have successfully been co-opted by the government. And it is often argued that the absence of a national (alternative) ideology pointing the way for the future of the country tends to inhibit change. As Narasingha P. Sil maintains, "Nigerian workers have neither a clear 'vision of an alternative order radically different to the one prevailing' nor a deep-rooted feeling of antagonism against the managerial or entrepreneurial classes."

The problems for this majority have been compounded by the attitude of successive governments toward it. Rather than blaming its own misdirected policies for the ills of society, the military has pointed the finger at citizens, blaming them for undermining the state. Programs such as Buhari's War Against Indiscipline (WAI) have cajoled Nigerians to be more disciplined, orderly, nationalistic, and hard-working. Such programs naturally do not address problems within the ruling hierarchies and, hence, have not had any success in achieving their vague goals. The social and economic problems of the masses do not appear to be included in calculations of policy by military leaders. And according to Shehu Othman, "it remains deeply unclear which elements in Nigeria's complex and poorly demarcated class structure really have the capacity to furnish the requisite political dynamism" to change things.

Public Policy and Politics

The rivalries connected with ethnicity and religion have translated into serious political conflict over two policy issues in particular—namely, the census and the creation of new states—which in other countries would perhaps not cause quite such a stir. The endless ethnic contest has politicized the census exercise since independence and has pushed governments to satisfy sectionalist demands by the creation of new states.

Census and Population Trends

The census has been the basis for the allocation of seats in national and regional assemblies as well as a component of federal revenue allocation. Consequently, size and location of population are extremely politicized issues. Partly for this reason, inasmuch as figures have been distorted by various groups for political gain, Nigeria has been unable to achieve an accurate count of its population since independence.
TABLE 3.1 Populations of Regions by Census ('000)

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<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>16,835</td>
<td>29,809</td>
<td>51,238</td>
<td>46,883</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>4,595</td>
<td>10,266</td>
<td>16,307</td>
<td>11,915</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Western</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td>2,536</td>
<td>4,359</td>
<td>4,730</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>7,215</td>
<td>12,394</td>
<td>21,304</td>
<td>18,922</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>2,920</td>
<td>5,685</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abuja</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

Total    | 30,404| 55,670| 96,128| 88,514| 98,238|

aThe figures for 1985 we projected from the 1963 census.

bData not available.


Other practical problems also exist, such as the difficulty of conceptualizing the "household" and the logistical complications involved in organizing censuses.

Censuses had been regularly undertaken by colonial authorities, the final one occurring in 1953. The 1931 census put the total population at 19,928,171. Of the major ethnic groups, the Hausa totaled 3,604,016; the Fulani, 2,025,189; the Igbo, 3,172,789; and the Yoruba, 3,166,154. By the final colonial census of 1953, the total population had risen to 30.4 million. The ethnic group totals at this time were as follows: Hausa, 5,489,000; Fulani, 3,041,000; Igbo, 5,485,000; and Yoruba, 5,047,000. Seats in the federal house were apportioned according to these figures, which, to the present day, are arguably the last reliable figures available.

After independence, a census was held in May 1962; but the results were not acceptable to the northern elite, who saw its region's relative share of the population decline. Both the west and the east recorded growths of 70 percent relative to the previous census, but the north recorded only 30 percent growth. Fearing a diminution of its political power evolving partly from population size and legislative seats, the government initially "reevaluated" the results; then it annulled them and ordered a fresh census to be held in 1963, claiming that the 1962 attempt had been " politicized." The November 1963 census duly recorded an "acceptable" northern region population of 29,809,000, up 67 percent from the 1953 census. Some 8 million additional northerners who had not appeared in the 1962 census were "found." At the same time, the southern ("opposition") population sizes increased by 65 percent in the east and 100 percent in the west, providing a national population total of 55,670,000—a staggering 74 percent growth in a decade. But nobody believed these figures. In fact, easterners were outraged by the blatant fiddling, another factor easing them down the path to secession. Yet this contentious census became the benchmark for population estimates and development planning for the next thirty years. (See Table 3.1 for a summary of the regions' populations.)
MAP 3.2  The Regions of Nigeria in 1964

MAP 3.3  The States of Nigeria in 1967
A census attempted under Gowon's administration in 1973 was canceled in 1975 by Murtala Muhammed because of its controversial nature, and no government sought to take on the challenge of a census until November 1991, when Babangida utilized 200,000 field officers at a cost conservatively put at $250 million. Census results in 1993 estimated the total population at 88.5 million, almost 30 million below official projections from the 1963 census (see Table 3.2). The census calculated the population growth at a slow 2.1 percent, lower than the African average. For the first time, the southern population was larger than the northern one (although the reconfigured federation of thirty-six states is far less susceptible to such census politics). Fraud still appeared to play a hand in the counting; but this time around, the census results were accepted with mild apathy. However, the Constitutional Convention in 1994 officially rejected the figures, further undermining their public confidence.

Urbanization has been a major population issue since before independence. Back in the 1930s the colonial authorities warned of housing and population pressures in Lagos,68 where conditions have since further deteriorated. The United Nations Population Fund has predicted that Lagos will be the third largest city in the world by 2015, with a population of 24 million.69 At independence the population of the western region was already 35 percent urbanized, compared to
TABLE 3.2 States’ Populations According to the 1991 Census

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abia</td>
<td>2,297,978</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adamawa</td>
<td>2,124,049</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akwa Ibom</td>
<td>2,359,736</td>
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<td>Anambra</td>
<td>2,767,903</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bauchi</td>
<td>4,294,413</td>
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<td>Benue</td>
<td>2,780,398</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borno</td>
<td>2,596,589</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross River</td>
<td>1,865,604</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>2,570,181</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edo</td>
<td>2,159,848</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enugu</td>
<td>3,161,295</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imo</td>
<td>2,485,499</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jigawa</td>
<td>2,829,929</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaduna</td>
<td>3,969,252</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kano</td>
<td>5,632,040</td>
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<td>Katsina</td>
<td>3,878,344</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kebbi</td>
<td>2,062,226</td>
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<td>Kogi</td>
<td>2,099,046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kwarar</td>
<td>1,566,469</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>5,685,781</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>2,482,367</td>
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<td>Ogun</td>
<td>2,338,570</td>
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<td>Ondo</td>
<td>3,884,485</td>
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<td>Osun</td>
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<td>Oyo</td>
<td>3,488,789</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plateau</td>
<td>3,283,704</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rivers</td>
<td>3,983,857</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sokoto</td>
<td>4,392,391</td>
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<td>Taraba</td>
<td>1,480,590</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yobe</td>
<td>1,411,481</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Capital Territory</td>
<td>378,671</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>88,514,501</strong></td>
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the east at only 7 percent and the north at 4 percent. The implication is that half of Nigeria’s urban dwellers were in the western region, largely in Ibadan and Lagos. Urbanization has increased across Nigeria, resulting in poor housing, sanitation, and infrastructure in the major cities. By 2028, according to some estimates, 70 percent of the population will be urbanized. These problems are magnified in Lagos, a city that many believe is out of control.

Partly because of Lagos’s problems, and partly out of northerners’ fears for political security in the south, plans to move the capital from Lagos to the center of the country in Abuja gathered pace during the 1980s, culminating in the official
move of government in December 1991. As a development strategy, this move has been heavily criticized for absorbing billions of naira that could otherwise have been spent on alleviating the woeful living conditions of the majority.

Population control, both in itself and as a means of control against AIDS, has made little headway in Nigerian society—partly owing to cultural resistance to limitations placed on the size of family and sexual practices. Other political and religious factors are involved as well. The first family-planning program was launched in Lagos in 1964, but because of the traditional political importance of population, many state governments have been reluctant to push too hard for population controls. The first national population control program was launched in 1988, aiming to reduce the average family size from six to four children and hoping to halve the number of women marrying before the age of eighteen. This program received a lukewarm response. As a result of religious tensions, family planning often takes on the appearance of a "conspiracy" by one religious group hoping to slow the growth of another's population. Meanwhile, in response to the strong resistance expressed by Islamic males against limits on the number of children they can have with multiple wives, the government initiated a campaign of "one man, four children."

Overall, there is little room for optimism that government regulations will work to limit population growth, and the pace of urbanization is expected to continue. At present, only 4 percent of Nigerian couples practice efficient family planning and half of all women have at least one child by the age of twenty. More than 80 percent of health clinics in the country offer no family-planning advice at all. And the poor levels of economic development in the country offer little hope for a substantial lowering of the population growth rate, which the United Nations estimates at more than 2.9 percent a year. Fertility rates have dropped from 7.1 in the 1970s to about 6.0 today, but these are still high, leading to projections of 152.21 million people in 2010 and 216.21 million people in 2025.

State Creation

A societal issue equally if not more important to the census has been the structural organization of the federation to give adequate representation to the diversity of population. At independence the three regional governments were sufficiently strong to challenge the power of the central government, and their residual ethnic bases undermined loyalty to a more cosmopolitan pan-ethnic Nigeria. The power of the regions led many observers to think that there would be little reconfiguration of the state structures. The catalogue of disasters during the First Republic, which was not halted by the creation of the mid-west region in 1964, led the country to the brink of civil war. Gowon's creation of twelve states from the four regions and federal capital in 1967 was a move made too little too late to avert the civil war (see Table 3.3), but Gowon began to take steps to assert the power of the federal center as well as to provide a voice and access to the "federal cake" for minority ethnic groups, especially in the north and east.
Calls for new states continued with great intensity and led to the devolution of power to nineteen states in 1976, twenty-one states in 1987, thirty states in 1991, and thirty-six states in 1996.\textsuperscript{75} Thirty-six states provide greater possibilities for smaller ethnic groups to control their local affairs via a state government, but their creation has led to a multiplication of government, bureaucracy, and overall

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\textsuperscript{75} Thirty-six states provide greater possibilities for smaller ethnic groups to control their local affairs via a state government, but their creation has led to a multiplication of government, bureaucracy, and overall
cost at a time of budgetary shortfalls. State creation has also had paradoxical impacts in terms of democracy: It appears to have strengthened local democracy by allowing for more state governments, but it has weakened democracy by creating nonviable states dependent for up to 80 percent of their revenues from the federal government. Babangida attempted to "empower" local governments to weaken the demands for new state creation, but with little success.76

Another important implication for the stability of the country has been the "perverse"77 impact of state creation on the character of the federation. Rather than fostering federalism, the mushrooming of states has heightened ethnic sensitivities. Many new states have blatantly catered to the demands of ethnic constituencies, leading to increased demands from groups not catered for. States have also tended to reinforce this identity by establishing recruitment patterns and quotas favoring indigenes of the state over people from outside. Thus, "the successive creation of states since independence has shown a gradual reversion to ethno-territorial principles."78 Even the names of some of the new states portray an ethnic identity rooted in precolonial Nigeria.

How many states should be created within the federation? That is a difficult question to answer. It is clear that pressures for the further breakup of the federation are very strong, and the Abacha government has hinted at a willingness to create more states. The dilution of states' powers vis-à-vis the federal center is of course reinforced by the latter's control over oil revenues, but the tinkering with the internal structure of government and representation of society seems destined to continue indefinitely.

**Society: Challenge and/or Consolidation?**

Identified for discussion in this section are four issues that provide both a challenge and/or a contribution to the construction of society. Others have been observed, of course, and are mentioned elsewhere; but, here, universities, the media, novelists, and gender are focused upon for their marked impacts on society. All of these issues are intertwined with efforts to construct a more solidified society; but they have also occasionally been used to challenge aspects of society, government, and misrule, and so have provided (positive) challenges to the stability of the country.

**Education**

During the colonial period, provision of education differed markedly from region to region. In particular, the south possessed many more schools than the north, in terms of both state and missionary schools. The growth of higher education was also greater in the south, with Ibadan becoming the first university college, linked to the University of London, in 1947.79 As B.A.T. Balewa notes, between 1948 and 1966 the ethnic composition of students in universities was slanted in favor of the south:
Yoruba students accounted for 42 percent of the total national student body, Igbo
31 percent, and Hausa-Fulani 0.8 percent. Higher-education facilities mush-
roomed in the oil-boom era of the 1970s, when no self-respecting state could exist
without its own university. This growth was most marked in the north, which
sought to gain lost ground in terms of status and the education of its own students.

By 1990 the country boasted 31 universities, 30 polytechnics, 54 colleges of edu-
cation, 45 federal government colleges, and 5,000 secondary schools. Education un-
til the age of fifteen was free and compulsory, but secondary enrollment in 1993 was
estimated to be only 29 percent of those eligible. Although placement at universities
was and is handled on a federal basis, northern universities were able to offer a
range of courses to students beyond degree programs that assisted the students’ edu-
cational advancement. While finances remained buoyant, the universities could
provide adequate educational facilities and were considered during the Second
Republic to be “one of the best means for developing national consciousness.”

Unfortunately, from the mid-1980s onward resources became increasingly lim-
ited. Student numbers grew, as did the demand for places; but facilities and
equipment could not keep up, and the quality of these institutions noticeably de-
clined. This was true both of the classroom and of associated resources, inasmuch
as lack of textbooks, paper, and photocopying facilities made teaching very diffi-
cult; but it was also true of student housing conditions, which at most universities
were appalling and resulted in tremendous student disaffection and tension.

Similar problems beset medical facilities and teaching hospitals, where the
paucity of equipment led to the decertification of several of them in the 1980s.

Universities have always been a source of commentary on government perfor-
manced and, at times, have helped to influence government policy. Criticisms have
stemmed both from the student body, organized in various student groups, and the
faculty, organized through the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). At
times, protest has been aimed at promoting regional or sectional goals. Students at
Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria) and Bayero University (Kano), for example, have
often protested in favor of Islamist goals even though there are significant numbers
of Christian students on campus. At universities in the west, such as Obafemi
Awolowo University (Ife) or in Lagos, the issues have often resonated with Yoruba
political sympathies broadly defined. And in the 1960s, the University of Nigeria
(Nsukka) was pivotal in providing intellectual guidance to the Biafra vision.

But universities have also carried the struggle on national issues, particularly in
attempts to promote democracy and economic development. After the mid-1980s,
university campuses became more hostile toward state and federal governments as
recession and structural adjustment undermined economic conditions on camp-
puses and in the country as a whole, and as hopes for transition to civilian govern-
ment were continually thwarted. By the 1990s, clashes with the military and the mo-
bile police—known as the “kill and go”—as well as shutdowns of the universities
were common and widespread. Campuses were riddled with spies and government
security forces, and universities became shadows of their former selves.
In September 1996, this hostility came to a head when university academics in many universities, particularly in the south, went on strike to protest government policies and low salaries, and the military retaliated by closing the universities and throwing many academics out of their university housing. The military “won” this particular battle, forcing academics back to work; but the morale of those in the learning environment could not be lower. The Babangida and Abacha regimes, in particular, have displayed a noticeable anti-intellectual bias, contributing to the presence of an estimated 10,000 Nigerians in higher education in the United States alone.83

The Media

Until the last few years, the media were among the freest and most outspoken in Africa, even during periods of military rule. The first newspaper to be published in Nigeria was a December 1859 edition in the Yoruba language. During the colonial era, newspapers were used by the nationalist movement to spread the word and challenge the colonial authorities, who were happy to allow their subjects to let off steam. After independence, these newspapers remained outspoken. Some of the largest papers, such as the Daily Times and New Nigerian, and the Hausa vernacular Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo, were government-owned and remained so after independence, but many other dailies and periodicals were independent. As the economy boomed with oil revenues, so did journalism: A brace of quality independent papers opened up in the space of a decade or more, notably Punch (1976), Concord (1980), Guardian (1983), Vanguard (1984), Reporter (1987), and Citizen (1990).84

Increasing heavy-handedness by the military over the last decade has led to the repeated shutting down of many papers and to the harassment and detention of journalists. One of the most outspoken antigovernment periodicals proved to be Newswatch, a high-quality investigative weekly that was essentially owned by its journalists, thereby maintaining independent standards. In 1986 its editor, Dele Giwa, who had trained with the New York Times, was assassinated by parcel bomb under mysterious circumstances—at the hands of government officials, many say. At the time it was known that Newswatch was about to run an exposé of President Babangida’s wife, who was allegedly involved in the international drug trade.

In the early 1990s, Moshood Abiola used his Concord group of papers to build up his political fortunes; but following the annulment of Abiola’s presidential victory, his short exile, and his subsequent imprisonment without trial, the group was closed down for more than a year and its fortunes have suffered ever since. Other newspapers reporting on rumors of coups or hostile to the transition program suffered a similar fate at the hands of the military. Alex Ibru’s Guardian group was closed down for more than a year, even though Ibru himself was a member of Abacha’s cabinet at the time. In 1993, fifty-four journalists were detained, and seventeen titles were banned by the military. In 1994, nineteen titles were banned. And
a year later the Abacha administration pressed its message home by jailing for fifteen years each of the editors of leading investigative magazines—namely, George Mbah of *Tell*, Ben Charles Obi of *Weekend Classique*, Kunle Ajibade of *News*, and Chris Anyawu of *Sunday Magazine*. These "Innocent Four," as they came to be known, were charged with being "accessories after the fact of treason" for reporting on the roundup of military officers allegedly involved in an attempted coup. Conversely, one of the best-known weeklies in the region, *West Africa*, increasingly displayed its government ownership by providing tepid coverage of political events, although it continued to be produced in London.

Today, there are approximately 15,000 print journalists registered in Nigeria, with about thirty daily newspapers, twenty weeklies, and thirty-two monthlies in print. Combined daily circulation of papers is estimated at less than a million, as rising costs of production have made papers too expensive for most people to buy. Advertising revenue has become a critical way for newspapers to stay afloat, but because a large proportion of advertising comes from government sources, this circumstance has been used as an indirect way to censor the press. The Newspaper Registration Decree also provides the government with a means to vet and ban undesirable newspapers. It calls for a nonrefundable 250,000 naira deposit before screening, another sure means of deterrence.

Such harassment has led to repeated discussion about the role of the media in Nigeria and the quality of news coverage. Problems of sensationalism and regional bias have at times brought discredit to the profession and appear to be on the increase, thus making it easier for the military to act against journalists. In an attempt to confuse readers, the military has occasionally published fake editions of antigovernment publications containing glowing praise for the government. And low salaries have made some journalists vulnerable to corruption and "brown envelope" reporting. In short, the frequent harassment has led to what has been called "guerrilla journalism," with newspapers operating undercover and journalists constantly on the run. These conditions, of course, are not ideal for journalism.

Television and radio were in a slightly different position as they remained under government control for much of the postindependence era and were used as mouthpieces for government policy and "nation building." Their importance to government was also attested by the fact that coup-makers were forced to seek control of the airwaves as a top priority in any coup. During the 1990s, as part of an overall program of privatization and government disinvestment, some radio and television stations were open to private ownership under Decree 38 of September 1992. However, they remained under the careful scrutiny of the military. Today there are more than twenty television stations in Nigeria. Radio remains the cheapest and most popular source of news, including that aired by international news media such as BBC World Service, but the number of new "music only" stations has also grown in recent years. Overall, there are an estimated 21.8 million radios and 7.4 million television sets in the country.
The Power of Fiction

A third area of consideration is the role played by authors and playwrights in shaping and reflecting society and in providing a challenge to successive governments. The strength, depth, and diversity of Nigeria's talented writers are widely accepted, as manifested by the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature awarded to Wole Soyinka, the Commonwealth Writers Prize to Isidore Okpewho, and the Booker Prize to Ben Okri, as well as by the awards received over three decades by Chinua Achebe. It is impossible to give full credit to the vitality of Nigerian authors and playwrights in so brief a summary as this section allows.

The National Arts Theatre opened in Lagos in 1976, linked to the Festival of Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC); but the arts have been distinguished both before and after that date. Much of the literature reflects on the transitions that have taken place within Nigerian society—from colonial rule to independent society, and from civilian to military government—as well as on the problems of democracy and probity in Nigerian life. In addition, many female authors, such as Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa, have contributed to the discussion of family and political values within the rapidly changing context of Nigerian society. The civil war provided fertile ground for authors and poets, but, more recently, military rule and its negative aspects have attracted much attention as well. Since his first novel, The Interpreters, in 1965, Wole Soyinka has become increasingly critical of the corruption and failure of the Nigerian polity, to the extent that he went into exile in the 1990s to struggle for democracy and give support, if necessary, to revolution. In plays such as A Play of Giants, a parody based on African dictators, and From Zia with Love, which looks at military government under Buhari, his message has been a powerful one. In the latter play, for example, Soyinka writes:

Don't mess with the military
Or we'll write your obituary
Underworld and over-brass
No one dare embarrass
Power, the pure commodity
To which our little ditty
Is for ever consecrated
Don't ignore or underrate it

State machinery
For State chicanery
Let who can resolve the riddle
How we guarantee the fiddle
Mum's the word among the ranks
Mum's the word in foreign banks
When State assignments coincide
With State consignments far and wide.
And portraying the thinking of military officers toward intellectuals, Soyinka coins these words:

There's too much thinking going on  
we'll put an end to it  
We've had enough of dissidents  
they must conform or quit.92

Though written specifically about the Buhari administration, these words are ringing criticisms of the Babangida and Abacha governments.

In turn, Chinweizu, who is credited with creating the term `lootocrats` to describe the political elite, has strong words to say on the subject of “Elections”—words that remain valid for the present:

It is the supreme virtue  
Of multi-party democracy  
That it requires its oligarchy  
To periodically invite the rabble to choose  
Which of rival gangs of well-bred crooks  
Should loot them  
With their prior and glad consent  
Now, their asking at all—  
Isn't that just civilized?93

Ken Saro-Wiwa's hostility to the Nigerian military is more noticeable in his nonfiction works, but occasionally his frustration at the failures of the country has been forthcoming in his novels. In *Prisoners of Jebs*, for instance, he wrote: “'What is the use crying for Nigeria or for Nigerians for that matter?' asked the Director. 'There's no use crying over spilt milk,' he concluded.”94

Ben Okri, who tends to be more “mystical” in his writing, had this to say in his award-winning *The Famished Road*: “We are forgetting those powers [of spirits and elders]. Now, all the powers these people have is selfishness, money and politics.”95 But perhaps Chinua Achebe, among all Nigerian writers, has done the most between independence and the present both to promote the craft of Nigerian writing and to push for a wider appreciation of it. Yet Achebe has fought accusations that Nigerian and African literature is somehow not on a par with European writing or that it should be judged in non-African terms. As he has argued: “Most African writers write out of an African experience and of commitment to an African destiny. For them, that destiny does not include a future European identity for which the present is but an apprenticeship.”96 Other Nigerian authors and poets, such as Femi Osofisan,97 have also contributed immensely to the healthy debate about their country's present and future.
Gender and Society

Nigeria, like all African societies, is male-dominated. The inequality that women face affects virtually all aspects of society; yet, despite the higher profile given to women's issues in recent years, there has been little progress in stopping such discrimination. Although there is significant agreement that women fared badly during the colonial period, there is less concurrence over their role in precolonial Nigeria. On the one hand are those who point to women's important role in agriculture and to such forceful characters as the famed Queen Amina of Zaria and the Queen of Daura. In a similar vein, they point to the actions of strong women during their mobilization in the colonial period—actions such as taxation protests during the women's riot in Aba in 1929 and a similar revolt in Abeokuta in 1947.

On the other hand are those who profess a little more skepticism about the role of women in the precolonial period, claiming that the examples just cited are really only exceptions to the overall pattern of discrimination against women and their weak status in society. Even in precolonial agriculture, it is argued, male labor carried more status. Female economic roles in craft industries such as weaving and pottery were wiped out by foreign competition during the colonial era. Colonialism did little or nothing to promote the cause of women and, in fact, helped to confirm a secondary status for them in society. During the nationalist struggle there were cases of female involvement at a leadership level, notably the role of Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti as treasurer of the Western NCNC and the head of the Nigerian Women's Union in the 1950s; but the relative absence of visible influential women in the colonial government and in London left Nigerian male political leaders with little reason to incorporate women into the decolonization process. Overall, as Ada Okwuosa argues, socialization and culture have kept women subservient in Nigerian society, and writings that suggest the contrary are merely "attempts to massage the ego of the feminist movement."

The obstacles to women in Nigeria are similar to those faced by women in most other African and Western societies. Socialization creates engendered roles such as looking after the household, caring for children, and cooking; and other patterns, such as the poorer educational opportunities available to women, have placed them in an inferior position. Although it is estimated that women provide the majority of agricultural production, this circumstance does not translate into political influence, which tends to emanate from industry and urban centers and also from control of financial resources, something women lack.

Marginal efforts were made to bring women into the political process in the Second Republic; they were "allowed" to vote for the first time in the states of northern Nigeria, highlighting the strong regional factors affecting women in society, but very few women stood or were elected to office. As Mae King has noted, only seventeen women contested National Assembly elections in 1979. And in the same year, in the Bendel State legislature, there were 197 male candidates as compared with only 4 females.
Similar efforts were made in the late 1980s and early 1990s, through the National Council of Women Societies of Nigeria, to provide education and awareness for women in the transition program, and in 1996 the 100 Group Nigeria was established to further women's roles in political parties and elected office. But women have arguably been "depoliticized" through socialization to remain outside of the political process. Their educational base is also weak, inasmuch as females rarely constitute more than 15 percent of university graduates in any given year, and various forms of intimidation continue to be directed against women and women's movements. For example, Catherine Acholonu, the vice-president of the Association of Women in Politics, was apparently held under house arrest for three weeks in 1993 to prevent her filing an application to run for the country's presidency.

Some women's programs are linked into the patronage system of the state and have been funded by government revenues. These include the Better Life for Rural Women Programme (known by critics as the Better Life for Governor's Wives) sponsored by Mrs. Babangida, the former president's wife, and the Family Support Program sponsored by Mrs. Abacha, the current head-of-state's wife. More radical programs such as Women in Nigeria (WIN) have faced predictable hostility from the male establishment. And family-planning programs have faced resistance from many areas of the country. Women will likely remain second-class citizens for the foreseeable future, as the country's ranking in the bottom ten of the United Nations Development Programme's "Gender Empowerment Index" seems to indicate. This situation, in turn, will continue to handicap Nigeria's prospects for democracy, because it is from the grassroots—from women—that democracy will have to be built if it is to succeed.

Conclusion: Creating an Enduring Society?

Peter Enahoro's book How to Be a Nigerian, initially published in 1966, is a humorous way of tackling the thorny problem of judging national identity, claiming half-seriously that "the search for the Nigerian is in process." The civil war could perhaps be seen as the culmination of pressures building up over several decades; certainly that war proved to be a challenge to the concept of "one" Nigeria.

Certain other interesting societal features merit mention in this final section as having provided an element of "national" culture and character within the society. The first is in the arena of sports. National teams, whether in soccer, track and field athletics, or other sports, provide heavily symbolic value for national integration. Nigeria was first allowed into the Olympic Games in 1952, and since then its athletes have brought credit to the country. Nigeria's soccer successes at various levels of the World Cup, from the Junior World Cup victory at the end of the 1980s and the senior tournament in 1994 to the Olympic soccer championship during the Atlanta Games of 1996, clearly helped to pull Nigerians together with common
pride. Nigeria’s women also represented Africa at the World Cup (soccer) in China in 1991. In another vein, Nigerian boycotts of Olympic and Commonwealth games in the 1970s and early 1980s helped galvanize the country’s foreign policy and popular support for a strong Nigerian role in world politics.

Music can also be seen as tying Nigerians together, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, and gender. However, some popular musicians do not find favor with the military establishment, which they target in their songs. Music by Fela Anikulapo Kuti and King Sunny Ade, to name just two musicians, bind Nigerians together across the spectrum and provide a common identity. Other facets of art such as batik work, carvings, and bronze sculptures, though possibly identifiable with specific regions of the country, nevertheless help to bring different groups together and generate pride in the artwork of the nation.

A Nigerian character and identity have emerged in the postindependence period, arguably placing society in a more confident position than during the 1960s. But pressures from ethnicity, religion, poverty, and political disillusionment, combined with failures of democracy, continue to challenge the stability of society. The collapse of countries such as Ethiopia, Liberia, and Rwanda point to worrying trends in ethnicity elsewhere—and, indeed, there is nothing permanent about Nigeria’s territorial status quo. Calls by the leaders of the 1990 attempted coup to expel five northern states from Nigeria are testimony to residual bitterness within certain sections of society.

One hopes that positive trends in economy and governance can be provided to hold Nigerian society together. The continuation of current negative trends could lead to an outcome too bitter to contemplate.

Notes

1. For a useful bibliography of materials, see Jean-Pascal Daloz, Nigeria: Society and Politics, No. 5, Centre d’Etude d’Afrique Noire, Bordeaux, 1992.
4. This census is arguably the last “accurate” one undertaken in Nigeria, since all those completed after independence have been tainted by gross violations.
8. The number of ethnic groups commonly given is 250, but the real total depends upon how they are counted. Based upon linguistic dialects, for instance, it is possible to distinguish as many as 400–500 ethnic groups in Nigeria.
22. A good example of this perception is Okechukwu Okeke’s Hausa-Fulani Hegemony: The Dominance of the Muslim North in Contemporary Nigerian Politics (Enugu: Acena, 1992).
24. Jean Boyd, with Hamzat M. Maishanu, Sultan Siddiq Abubakar III: Sarkin Musulmi (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1991). In an interesting twist of history, Abubakar was born on 15 March 1903, the same day that the British occupied Sokoto.


36. A good example of such politicians is Nnamdi Azikiwe, a leading nationalist during the colonial era and the first president of Nigeria, who nevertheless remained unable to sever himself from his "natural" political base among the Igbo up until his death in 1996.


42. First, The Barrel of a Gun, p. 113.


46. Olatunde Oloko, a professor of sociology at the University of Lagos, has argued that "one of the root causes of political corruption" has been for the "elite to satisfy the material

47. The Guardian (London), 1 August 1997.


62. Ibid., p. 371.


75. The new states created in October 1996 were Bayelsa (created out of Rivers), Ebonyi (out of Abia and Enugu), Ekiti (out of Ondo), Gombe (out of Bauchi), Nassarawa (out of Plateau), and Zamfara (out of Sokoto). In addition, 182 new local governments were created.


92. Soyinka, From Zia with Love, p. 89.


104. Of course, this is the case outside of Nigeria as well. For further discussion, see Georgina Waylen, “Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics,” *World Politics*, 46(3), April 1994, pp. 327–354.


109. Fela became a major symbol of defiance, having been imprisoned by several military rulers. Over the last couple of years before his death in August 1997, he had apparently turned more to religion.

110. Tragically, much of this artwork was looted from museums and galleries and shipped overseas during the 1990s.
The first three chapters have already highlighted the fact that Nigeria's domestic political environment is a delicate and at times volatile one. The combination of colonial legacy and ethnoreligious diversity provides a difficult structural framework within which political issues need to be resolved, and tensions generated by the ongoing civilian-military relationship and a deteriorating economic environment affect a polity in which miracles are seemingly required to maintain stability. Such miracles have occurred occasionally but not consistently, and so the almost forty years of political development since independence in October 1960 have been marred by internal instability, duplicity, thuggery, numerous coups d'état, and entrenched military government.

It is ironic that civilian government is still considered the norm for Nigeria even though military governments have been in power for three times longer. The current "transition" program to civilian government has been in progress in one form or another since 1985, a fact that causes many Nigerians to wonder whether handing over power is the military's real intention. To fully grasp the intricacies of the civilian-military relationship and to assess the performance of, and likelihood of stability in, the Nigerian polity, we must trace its political development from the flush of expectation at the time of independence to the present (see Table 4.1). To that endeavor we now turn.

The First Republic: 1960–1966

The Players and Parties

It is difficult to overestimate the impact of the colonial legacy on the political landscape of the First Republic. During the 1950s, the colonial authorities had allowed a situation to develop involving increasing tension between the dominant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Head-of-State</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>How Ended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-1966</td>
<td>Tafawa-Balewa</td>
<td>Hausa-Fulani</td>
<td>Attempted coup/Assassination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Aguiyi-Ironsni</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Coup/Assassination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1975</td>
<td>Gowon</td>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1976</td>
<td>Muhammed</td>
<td>Hausa-Fulani</td>
<td>Attempted coup/Assassination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1979</td>
<td>Obasanjo</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-1983</td>
<td>Shagari</td>
<td>Hausa-Fulani</td>
<td>Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1985</td>
<td>Buhari</td>
<td>Hausa-Fulani</td>
<td>Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1993</td>
<td>Babangida</td>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>Stepped down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Abiola</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Election annulled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Shonekan</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-</td>
<td>Abacha</td>
<td>Kanuri</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

ethnic groups holding power at the respective regional level as they contested for control over the federal government. In addition, conflict simmered between those dominant groups and the minorities who perceived that they were being frozen out of the political game.

Independence was taken up by a federal government that reflected the strength of the conservative Islamic Northern establishment, which had gained a majority of seats in the 1959 federal election. Of the 312 seats in the House of Representatives, 174 were allocated to the northern region, 73 to the east, 62 to the west, and 3 to Lagos. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) won 142 seats—by far the largest share, but well short of a majority. Accordingly, the NPC formed a coalition with the primarily eastern-based National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), leaving the western-based Action Group (AG), along with various minority parties of the north and middle belt, to form the federal opposition.

An upper house, the Senate, was created with forty-eight members, twelve nominated by each region and a further twelve nominated to look after "federal interests." The powers of the Senate were somewhat equivalent to those of the British House of Lords. The Senate had the authority to hold up legislation for a short time and to introduce legislation, but it was clearly secondary to the House of Representatives and would ultimately play a very minor role in the politics of the First Republic.

At the regional level, governments had significant autonomy to develop their own domestic, developmental, and foreign economic policies. There were also strong indications of the emergence of one-party systems within each region. The NPC dominated the Northern Regional Assembly, just as the NCNC had a stranglehold over the eastern region. Those parties could control the reward and patronage system in their respective regions, enabling them to reward and enrich their supporters but also to attract defectors. On the other hand, opponents were punished for their foolishness and frozen out of the system. In the western region, the AG could never control more than 50 percent of the seats in the assembly after
1960 and so could not wield authority and control to the same extent as the other major parties in the north and east. This situation exacerbated conflict within the highly competitive atmosphere of the region.

Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and probably the most influential of First Republic politicians, was NPC leader and chose to remain as premier of the northern region. His deputy, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, became the federal premier and remained in this position until his assassination in the coup d’état of January 1966. In the western region, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola of the AG became premier; and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, as the party’s leader, chose to become leader of the “loyal” opposition in the federal House of Representatives. It was the fraught relationship between Akintola and Awolowo and the policies that each espoused that would eventually become a focus for instability. In the eastern region, Dr. Michael Okpara became regional premier. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, clearly the spiritual leader of the NCNC, relinquished the official position to become leader of the Senate at the federal level in 1960, governor-general in 1962, and then the country’s first (ceremonial) president when Nigeria became a republic in October 1963.

The British had bequeathed their Westminster model of parliamentary government complete with upper and lower houses, a prime minister, and a “loyal” opposition. Nigerians’ experience of this system was limited to a semicontrolled experiment during the colonial era. The British assumed that this political system was the best option and would work to keep the country united and stable. However, this assumption was quickly exposed as flawed, especially as ethnic-based politics proved too confrontational for the parliament to handle.

Of course, one critical difference between Britain and Nigeria was the federal structure of the latter. Its instability had been managed by the controlling presence of British colonial authorities, but after 1960 the fractures quickly showed. Confrontation took place not only within the federal government but also between it and regional governments, notably those of the west and east not controlled by the NPC.

**The Political Game**

After independence, competition among the elite for the spoils of office intensified. The objective of the parties was to control the federal center or a regional government to optimize opportunities for patronage. The NPC, however, maintained its grip on the federal government throughout the First Republic, requiring other parties to seek alliances with it in order to access the patronage system. At the regional level, elections helped to reinforce control by the dominant parties. In the western elections of August 1960, the AG won 80 of 124 seats. In the northern elections of May 1961, the NPC swept the region with 160 of 174 seats. And in the eastern elections in November 1961, the NCNC asserted its power by winning 106 of 146 seats.
None of these elections gave much hope to the minorities, whose voices were drowned out by the larger ethnic groups dominating regional assemblies. These minorities could choose ways to incorporate with the dominant parties and thereby gain access to the reward system, or else they could form alliances with opposition parties in the hope of toppling the dominant parties at the next election. New parties were also formed, particularly on the left; an example of the latter was the socialist Workers and Farmers Party.

Tensions within the western region rose quickly. The Yoruba had never been a cohesive ethnic group; and after independence, divisions became apparent, intensified by alternative visions put forward by different factions. Awolowo continued to challenge for power at the federal level and sought a new policy approach that would gain nationwide support for the AG. This approach was to take the form of democratic socialism, and Awolowo and his supporters became increasingly radical in the policies they supported. Awolowo visited Kwame Nkrumah in June 1961 and, upon his return, espoused a radical foreign policy including the nationalization of foreign businesses and the abrogation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact.

These policies did little to endear Awolowo either to the federal government or to the more conservative Yoruba. Organizing around the western governor, Chief Akintola, these politicians accepted the fact that they could not break the NPC's grip on the federal government and thus wanted to seek alliances with the NPC to open access to federal patronage systems. The conflict between these two camps spilled into the open in May 1962, when Awolowo sought to remove Akintola from office. Following a fistfight in the Western Regional Assembly, the federal government seized its opportunity and declared a state of emergency, installing a federal administrator to run the region.

In September 1962, Awolowo and thirty supporters were arrested, charged with sedition, tried in controversial circumstances, and imprisoned for long spells—an indication that the NPC wanted to destroy its opponents. Akintola was reinstalled as governor in January 1963, with his new United Peoples Party (UPP) controlling the assembly. The NPC and NCNC also used the opportunity afforded by the conflict within the AG and the region as a whole to hold a referendum concerning the division of the western region. The referendum passed, and the division was supported by the other regions; thus a mid-west region was created in 1964, sandwiched between the eastern and western regions. The NCNC was able to win the first mid-west regional elections, installing Chief Osadebay as premier. As a result, the NCNC's influence in the south was extended and the AG was squeezed even further.

Clearly, enough tensions had occurred by 1964 to test the country's stability. Yet, despite severe problems, it was by no means inevitable that the country would fall apart. However, after the 1964 federal elections, that outcome became far more likely. Tensions had been growing between the NPC and its junior partner in government, the NCNC. The NPC had grown in size, thanks to defections from smaller parties, and it hardly needed the NCNC. The NPC's ruthless manip-
ulation of the 1962 and 1963 censuses, as discussed in Chapter 3, demonstrated that the northern elite would maintain control at any price—even to the detriment of its NCNC partners.\(^\text{10}\) Within the western region the AG was also regrouping and planning strategy, and an alliance came together, with support from Awolowo (who was still in jail), between the NCNC and AG and other progressive Northern groups—notably the Nigerian Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). This alliance took the name the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA).

The UPGA had also responded to moves between the NPC and Akintola's UPP. Akintola had re-formed his party in March 1964 into the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), swallowing up many NCNC supporters in the western region. The NNDP, wishing to maintain its linkages with the NPC, formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) under the leadership of the NPC. Two main coalitions lined up to contest the December 1964 federal elections, but the NPC used its muscle to manipulate the outcome and weaken the southern coalition.

This manipulation took many different forms, from violence to ballot rigging to the use of the machinery of government to block the democratic process. By finding ingenious ways to refuse to register opposition candidates, the NPC returned 88 of its NPC candidates “unopposed.” Its flagrant abuse of power led to calls for a postponement of the election, but they continued despite a clash between Azikiwe and Balewa. The UPGA called a last-minute boycott of the election, but it was unevenly supported and merely increased its losses. Only in the eastern region was the boycott observed, and that is because the NCNC used its government powers to close the polling stations.

Not surprisingly, the NNA swept the polls and Balewa reassumed the premiership. But for several days President Azikiwe refused to call on Balewa to form a government, preferring fresh elections to be held. In this case Azikiwe appeared to be influenced by his Igbo/NCNC sympathies rather than by his federal constitutional position. Both Azikiwe and Balewa called on the military to support their respective causes, thus drawing the military into political life. As Billy Dudley argues, Azikiwe and Balewa “only succeeded in making the armed forces ultra-conscious of the blurred boundary lines separating the ‘military’ from the ‘civil’ and the ‘legal’ from the ‘political.’”\(^\text{11}\) Significantly, Lieutenant-Colonel Ojukwu, the future leader of Biafra, pledged his support to Azikiwe, highlighting the increasing ethnic sentiments within army ranks.\(^\text{12}\) Other military leaders supported Balewa, and Azikiwe backed down and called on the NPC to form the government. As Kenneth Post and Michael Vickers have concluded, “The 1964–5 federal election was to show that the control capacity of those already in power could be exerted in an electoral situation as in any other.”\(^\text{13}\)

Federal elections rescheduled in March 1965 in the eastern region gave the NCNC victory there. But this victory was hollow in light of the vast abuses undertaken by the NPC within the NNA, and Igbo frustration simmered. Antagonism reached new heights in October during the western regional elections. Here the
NNDP used naked force to defeat the UPGA, thereby igniting widespread violence within the region. The NNPD’s need for funds led the government to cut the price paid to cocoa farmers by almost 50 percent; in other words, it skimmed cocoa revenues for political purposes. This action prompted a full-scale rebellion by peasant farmers, leaving the region ungovernable. By the end of 1965 complete lawlessness prevailed in the region, with many people losing their lives.\textsuperscript{14}

When Akintola and Ahmadu Bello met in January 1966, it appeared inevitable that the military would be sent into the west to restore order, and southerners in general seemed resigned to the prospect that the Balewa government would continue with its policies. However, some military officers had decided to implement other plans of their own. As Post and Vickers rightly note, “The fabric of the Nigerian system was already so worn by that time that it could scarcely take another patch of compromise; a little more strain and it tore irreparably.”\textsuperscript{15} In short, the year 1966 brought traumatic change to the country—arguably, change from which it has yet to recover.

**Military Rule: 1966–1979**

**The 1966 Coups d’État**

On the night of 14 January 1966 a coup d’état organized by seven majors, six of them Igbo, changed the path of Nigerian history.\textsuperscript{16} At the time, many perceived the coup led by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu\textsuperscript{17} to be the almost inevitable backlash by the Igbo people, frustrated at the machinations of the NPC government, and by Igbo officers who found their likely promotion path blocked. This perception was almost unanimously held in the north, where the political leadership, notably Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa, had been killed—as had NPC allies such as Akintola in the west. In all, about thirty people died in the coup, one of the bloodiest to date.

A more subdued interpretation holds that this event was a nationalist uprising, aiming to curb the reckless power of the NPC and wipe out feudal, sectionalist leadership. As Ben Gbulie, one of the coup plotters, stated: “For far too long the country had been at the crossroads tottering dangerously on the brink of disaster. The political situation was gradually but surely getting out of hand.”\textsuperscript{18} The leaders of the coup, as a result of poor organization and misfortune, or perhaps overconfidence, were unable to gain complete control of Lagos and other key parts of the country, and were forced to cede power to the head of the armed forces, Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi.

Ironsi, an Igbo, vacillated and appeared unsure of how to proceed. He did, however, proscribe all eighty-one political parties in the country as well as twenty-six ethnic and cultural associations. Ironsi made public his intent to sweep the country clean of corruption, a claim (and a speech) that was copied by all subsequent military leaders: “The Federal Military Government will stamp out cor-
ruption and dishonesty in our public life with ruthless efficiency and restore integrity and self-respect in our public affairs. In the public service efficiency and merit will be the criteria for advancement." In May 1966 he sought to neutralize northern power by eradicating the federal structure and converting the country to a unitary framework. In the north, the hostility to such perceived provocation did not take long to materialize, and talk of secession spread across the region. But before that could occur, a northern officers' countercoup swept the Ironsi government out of office on 29 July 1966, killing Ironsi and the western military premier. Yakubu Gowon, a thirty-one-year-old Christian minority Anga northerner and lieutenant-colonel, was selected to become a compromise head-of-state, hoping to hold the various antagonistic factions of the country together.

The two coups had irrevocably upset the delicate balance of relations between the various ethnic factions in the country, and severe social conflict ensued. Many thousands of Igbo were killed in the north, especially in Kano, as Muslims sought revenge for the January coup. A second massacre of Igbo occurred in September 1966, leaving up to 30,000 dead after what turned out to be false rumors spread across the north of massacres in the south. Millions of Igbo fled from the north to the comparative safety of the eastern region. Gowon reinstated the federal structure in the country and, after overcoming northern opposition, broke the four regions into twelve states in May 1967 in a last-ditch attempt to avert a breakdown of society and appease Igbo, Yoruba, and minority interests. The north and the south were divided into six states each; the East comprised three states; and Lagos, the west, and the mid-west remained intact. Secessionist rumbles continued to be heard within the north and east, although strong internal pressures, as well as external ones from Britain and the United States, prevented the north from carrying out its threat.

In the east, however, the pressures for secession seemed inexorable. Unhappy about their peripheral status in the country's polity, stung by the vicious assault on them by others within the federation, and buoyed by proximity to the country's emerging economic lifeblood of oil, the Igbo were willing to take their chances alone. Lieutenant-Colonel Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, the thirty-three-year-old Oxford-educated military governor of the eastern region, laid out the Igbo cause: "The East will never be intimidated nor will she acquiesce to any form of dictation... It is not our intention to be slaughtered in our beds. We are ready to defend our homeland. We are prepared to crush any aggressors." Ojukwu took over all federal revenues in his region in March 1967, and on 26 May of that year the regional assembly approved the move to independence. Gowon blockaded the states of the former eastern region, and the independent state of Biafra came into existence on 30 May. Within weeks the civil war began in earnest.


The civil war began on 6 July 1967 and ended on 12 January 1970. It was largely about the competition for power and the economic spoils of office between the
dominant ethnic groups and their respective elites, but it included elements of the struggle between the large ethnic groups and the minorities, as well as economic development and dependency issues. Although Igbo were the critical elements forging secession in the east, there were many non-Igbo in this region caught up in the struggle. To them, Igbo domination inside or outside Biafra was not encouraging, a perception that muddied the justification of self-determination for the region.

Biafrans could not hope to defeat the federation militarily, so their strategy was based on controlling the important oil fields and seeking diplomatic support internationally for recognition. Biafra received significant sympathy around Africa and abroad, but only four African states officially recognized its independence—namely, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Tanzania, and Zambia—although Angola and South Africa also gave support. Initial attempts by the Commonwealth and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to broker a peace agreement failed. France, from which Nigeria severed diplomatic relations between 1961 and 1965 following France's atomic tests in Algeria, sought advantage in the region by assisting Biafra with weapons; but it stopped short of official recognition, as did Portugal.

Britain and the United States were initially hamstrung by strong public opinion favoring the Biafrans—opinion fueled by a Swiss company's clever public-relations exercises on the Biafrans' behalf that portrayed them as the "Jews" of Nigeria. In addition, Britain and the United States were concerned about the continuing supply of oil, especially as the Biafrans experienced major initial successes, taking Benin and moving within 100 miles of Lagos before being turned back at the Battle of Ore. Such wavering led the federal government to turn to the Soviet Union and its allies for military support, particularly for the air force. This support was forthcoming and considerable as the USSR was quick to seize the opportunity for a more substantial foothold in the region.

Realizing its predicament, the British government increased support to the federal side in the later stages of the civil war, especially after federal troops regained important oil installations at Bonny, Port Harcourt, and Calabar, and provided considerable military supplies and diplomatic support. The war attracted intense interest from around Africa as many states faced similar situations of ethnic diversity at home. Initially, the Biafrans fared well, cleverly improvising on military equipment and tactics. But soon the federal side's strength in numbers and equipment began to prevail, especially given its domination of the skies; eventually its increasing stranglehold on the region also led to an ever-diminishing food supply. Military losses on both sides were high, but it was the toll of "innocent" women and children, starved to death by the food blockade, that left an indelible mark on many survivors.

Although the war seemed to drag on at great human cost, estimated at more than 1 million dead, it came to a quick end in January 1970 following the federal conquest of Owerri and moves toward the Biafran airstrip at Uli. The state of
Biafra was now only one-tenth of its original size. Ojukwu steadfastly refused negotiations, bringing “self-inflicted genocide” to the Biafrans; but his decision to go into exile removed a potential stumbling block to peace and allowed those favoring dialogue within the Biafran camp to agree to an unconditional surrender. This situation laid them open to possible harsh treatment by the federal victors, but Gowon's magnanimity in victory allowed for reconciliation and at least some hope for a reunited country. Biafran leaders were treated with respect by the federal government, and attempts to integrate the east back into the federation were made. From out of so harsh a tragedy it was comforting to see such generous spirit in rebuilding the national fabric. Yet the memory of the war continues to cast a shadow over Nigeria; in particular, it limits outright calls for secession.


Following the war, reconciliation and rebuilding were helped enormously by the massive revenues accruing from oil exports. Such resources enabled the government to be financially magnanimous in victory—an important capability. They also served to divert Nigerians’ attention to better and more positive things. Now tangibly united, Nigeria began to flex its diplomatic muscle on the African and global stages, playing a key role in negotiations with Europe that led to the signing of the first Lomé Convention in 1975 and, in the same year, drawing the region together in the creation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Such actions redrew the international image of Nigeria in a much more positive light and helped satisfy the desire for status and respect that had been neglected during the civil war.

Despite a booming economy and successes in negotiating the Lomé Convention and ECOWAS, the Gowon administration lost its popular support among the people for two primary reasons (in fact, the mistakes it made were repeated by the Babangida and Abacha regimes in the 1990s). First, conspicuous corruption could not be ignored as the elite helped itself to the country's oil revenues. Development was promised, but little actually trickled down to the poorest in society. The most notorious scandal concerned the Ministry of Defence's order for cement for the construction of federal barracks. Corruption so inflated the order that it totaled four times the tonnage handled by all Nigerian ports the previous year and left more than 200 ships waiting off Nigerian ports. Gowon’s military governors were also flagrantly corrupt, but Gowon was unwilling to curb them.

Second, Gowon reneged on promises to return the country to civilian rule, leading to dissatisfaction among civilians as well as within the military. Elites in the far north were also concerned at the increasing southern influence around Gowon, and they used their influence to isolate Gowon as much as possible. When Gowon was out of the country in mid-1975, a group of officers took advantage to mount a coup. Gowon remained in exile in the U.K., eventually taking a degree in politics.
from the University of Warwick and then returning to Nigeria under a full pardon from Shehu Shagari. In his place came a radical Hausa-Fulani officer, Murtala Muhammed, who attempted to reshape the character of the country.

Transition Politics: 1975–1979

Murtala’s crusade lasted about one year before he himself was assassinated by disgruntled army officers, many of whom were from Gowon’s home area. Murtala had attempted to clamp down on the most blatant corruption and also to cut back the size of the armed forces, which had bloated to over 250,000 troops from the civil war. Of the 170 officers purged, more than half were from minority ethnic groups. Murtala’s aggressive action stretched toward revitalizing the civil service and breathing more discipline into the workforce, which led to the loss of 10,000 public service jobs. As Elechi Amadi artfully pointed out in his novel *Estrangement*, “For several weeks after the coup, many a civil servant lost weight as he glued his ears and eyes to the radio and television, listening to news of the latest victims of the purge.” Murtala also quickly set out a path to the recivilization of the government by 1979, a popular goal across the country.

In foreign policy, Murtala accentuated Nigeria’s growing international stature—specifically, by more aggressively pursuing national interest and policy. The best example of this effort was Murtala’s decision to recognize the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) faction in Angola, thereby tipping the diplomatic scales within the OAU in favor of the MPLA and antagonizing the Western bloc, the United States in particular.

Murtala’s sudden demise in an unsuccessful coup shortened his legacy. It is widely believed that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency connived with dissidents to overthrow Murtala and that the British government knew of these activities and compounded difficulties by granting asylum to Gowon, who was wanted for questioning in relation to the assassination of Murtala. Questions abound as to how Nigeria might have fared with Murtala in power for another four years. In the north, certainly, his name is still revered among radicals, and “Ramatism” is viewed with nostalgia and calls for action, as witnessed most recently in 1996 when the twentieth anniversary of his assassination was commemorated.

Murtala was succeeded by his deputy, Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba who proclaimed adherence to Murtala’s objectives if not necessarily to his zeal. The country’s foreign policy retained its radical and dynamic edge, and Nigerians became accustomed to having their country courted by the major powers. President Jimmy Carter’s visit to the country, the first ever by a serving U.S. president, gave an indication of Nigeria’s stature, boosted by burgeoning revenues generated by the rapidly ascending price of oil.

At home, Obasanjo set about the task of providing substance to Murtala’s promise to return to the barracks in 1979. Obasanjo established a detailed plan of action that included a Constitutional Drafting Committee, which completed its task
in October 1976. A Constituent Assembly was established in October 1977 and finished its work in June 1978.\textsuperscript{37} The topic that caused the most consternation was that of Shari’a law and, specifically, northerners’ (failed) attempts to have it applied throughout the country. The constitution, promulgated in October 1978, provided a presidential system of government with executive president and two federal houses, and strove to promote the principle of “federal character” under which positions in government and the civil service would be shared in a manner not to exclude any ethnic group.\textsuperscript{38} The cabinet was to include at least one member from every state in the federation. In the military, specific quotas for officers, which had been the case in the First Republic, were rejected. The ban on politics was lifted in September 1978, allowing a year for campaigns and for state and federal elections prior to the transfer of power in October 1979. It is a credit to Obasanjo that subsequent military leaders have essentially followed this model of transition but that Obasanjo’s, to date, is the only one to have been successfully completed.

Although fifty-two political associations emerged, only nineteen vied for validation, and only five were approved under the main criterion laid down by the military—ostensibly, that they should be national in scope. These were the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigeria People’s Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP), and the People’s Redemption Party (PRP). Though not mere replicas, these parties were similar to those of the First Republic in many respects.\textsuperscript{39}

The NPN was primarily a party of the far northern establishment, but with widespread support from the southern minorities; so it was similar in outlook to the NPC even though it did not exert its monolithic power. Its presidential candidate was Shehu Shagari, a minister in the First Republic and the federal commissioner for finance under Gowon. The UPN centered upon Obafemi Awolowo, and had much of the western support base of the old AG, with a touch of radicalism. The NPP called for much of its support from the old eastern region, and its figurehead was Nnamdi Azikiwe.\textsuperscript{40} The GNPP, under Waziri Ibrahim, a cabinet minister in the First Republic, was an offshoot of the NPP and attempted to pull together minority groups. Finally, the PRP comprised the radical anti-establishment north and northerners minorities and, as in the First Republic, focused on Aminu Kano as its leader and on his philosophy of “Democratic Humanism.”

Although it is true that a range of political philosophies was offered by these parties, they centered more on personalities than on policy. None of them threatened the status quo unduly, nor did they appear to threaten the vested interests of the military—an important criterion for gaining the military’s approval. All of them were required to have offices in every state and could not exclude members on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Nevertheless, the parties tended to represent identifiable sectional interests.\textsuperscript{41}

During the elections of 1979,\textsuperscript{42} the NPN fared well in the north, as was expected; but it could not prevent the PRP from winning Kano and the governorship of Kaduna. The NPN drew on minority support to win outside of its far-north
"heartland" in Benue, Cross River, Kwara, Niger, and Rivers states. The UPN managed to tie up the western states of Bendel, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, and Oyo; and the NPP won the eastern states of Anambra and Imo, as well as Plateau. At the federal level, the NPN secured 36 of 95 seats in the Senate and 168 of 449 seats in the House of Representatives. In the presidential elections, Shehu Shagari received 5.6 million votes and beat out a strong challenge from Obafemi Awolowo with 4.9 million, but not until after Awolowo had challenged the result in the Supreme Court. The constitution required the victor to have 25 percent or more of the vote in at least two-thirds of the states. Shagari fell short of this criterion in one state. However, the court ruled that in this thirteenth state, votes needed could be one-quarter of two-thirds of the total cast, thus allowing Shagari to capture the presidency without a two-way runoff in which Awolowo would have proved very strong. This was the closest Awolowo ever came to being chief executive. Not surprisingly, many Yoruba loyal to him were hostile to the federal government of the Second Republic even before it was sworn into office on 1 October 1979.

The Second Republic: 1979–1983

The military finally ceded power to the new civilian administrations in an atmosphere of hope and anticipation. The new constitution was widely regarded as a good and workable document and as the benchmark by which the 1998 constitution is judged. At the federal level the NPN brokered an alliance with the NPP, reminiscent of actions taken during the First Republic, but the NPP gained little from this partnership and it withered in 1981.

The NPN used its powers of patronage to co-opt various key leaders from around the country, as symbolized by a bloated cabinet of more than forty ministers. A strong patron-client relationship emerged whereby federal revenues were used to foster compliance to the NPN. The promise of federal contracts also served to maintain the support of large elements of the Nigerian business community; indeed, the party came to be known locally as the "Naira Party of Nigeria." Based on the large oil revenues, President Shagari could promise development for every Nigerian and not just the elite. In addition, the cohesion among such diverse and competitive egos (or "big men," in Nigerian parlance) was maintained through a "zoning" system whereby senior offices of party and government were to be rotated around the four zones—namely, north, west, east and minorities. That such zoning never occurred in practice hints at the north's reluctance to relinquish key positions, especially the presidency—an issue apparently behind the annulment of the 1993 election. However, the NPN did provide major access to patronage for the minorities' elites, thereby giving the party a greater semblance of national representation than either the NPP or UPN had done.

At the state level the picture was more confusing, with twelve states, mainly in the south, controlled by opposition parties hostile to the NPN federal government. In the early months of the Second Republic, each of these governments
struggled to find their feet and some measure of accommodation. However, this stability was not to last long.

Several fracture points became visible within a year. First, the ruling NPN was clearly annoyed by the fact that it held the majority of seats in the Kaduna State House of Assembly but not the governorship; the latter was in the hands of the PRP’s Balarabe Musa, who had won by just 9,000 votes. Kaduna, the home of the northern government in colonial times and during the First Republic, was also the center of the northern establishment, and this populist challenge did not sit well with the NPN. A radical slate of policies supported by the governor was consistently blocked by the assembly, and serious political clashes became the norm until the governor was eventually impeached in 1981 in a political show-trial. Aminu Kano had already jettisoned Musa from the PRP in an attempt to maintain cordial patronage linkages with the NPN.

Second, the NPN’s control of federal largesse and levers of power was opposed by the UPN and NPP, which formed a loose opposition alliance in the south. This alliance, too, repeated a theme from the First Republic, and the ensuing tensions undermined the smooth running of the country. The opposition never quite maximized its potential, owing partly to the ongoing personality and ideological clashes between Awolowo and Azikiwe. The states themselves had sufficient revenue to maintain a level of detachment from the federal government, thus resisting, to some extent, the powers of the federal government that had grown significantly under the military. States also sought to give greater employment possibilities to indigenes, further weakening federal principles across the country.

But the NPN’s federal power of patronage, including the Presidential Liaison Offices (PLOs) in each state, did serve to infiltrate the “opposition” states and bring significant numbers of supporters, particularly businesspersons, into the NPN camp. Judiciously timed pardons for Gowon and, later, Ojukwu gave the NPN more support in the middle belt and eastern states, respectively. But this development only hardened the attitudes of those in the opposition, as did the persistent manipulation of federal government powers by the NPN. Tantalizing half-promises to the more than 100 applications for new states received by the Shagari administration also sought to attract support.

Such tensions of political power and turf, rather than of policy, increased gradually. Then they exploded after the 1983 elections, during which the NPN manipulated the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and used its political muscle and control of paramilitary police to “guarantee” many results in the south, leading to widespread unrest in the western states (reminiscent of the events of 1965). Furthermore, disillusionment within NPN ranks in these southern states intensified after the NPN’s northern elite rejected “zoning” and refused to allow the presidency to rotate. One prominent Yoruba resignation from the NPN at this time was that of Chief Moshood Abiola.

Third, the conspicuous corruption of the NPN elite gradually became too excessive to ignore. Corruption is a common thread in all Nigerian governments,
but the Obasanjo administration had managed to limit such tendencies somewhat. The flamboyance of the political class in displaying its wealth, combined with the blatant patronage system installed to buy loyalty, contrasted with the popular expectation that the new civilian government would somehow be “better” than previous administrations. Such activities, along with the aggressive undermining of other parties, left the NPN with little moral support beyond that of the northern and southern minorities—and even among them there were many critics. When the NPN was finally ousted by the military in December 1983, the wide popularity of the coup surprised no one.47

Fourth, Nigeria’s economic conditions gradually worsened during the four years of the Shagari presidency. When the floor fell out of the oil market following the glut and falling prices of the early 1980s, the economy faltered. The problems that resulted were magnified by the poor fiscal performance of the federal government and most state governments. Gross budgetary overexpenditures and large bank debts became a heavy weight on the country. The NPN’s poor domestic policy performance could no longer be rescued by the oil sector and Shagari was faced with tough economic decisions, few of which he chose to resolve.

By 1983, considerable tensions had built up, exacerbated by the elections of that year. One new party, the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP), was added to the electoral equation. The NAP was primarily a southern-based party of professionals and intellectuals espousing radical reform, but it made little progress in terms of votes or programs. The tensions between the northern-led federal government and the southwestern-led opposition were reminiscent of those witnessed during the First Republic, but the NPN was not going to allow itself to lose control.

The electoral register of 1983 was inflated by 34 percent over that of 1979, a sign of evident manipulation. In addition, the order of elections was reversed from that of 1979, placing the presidential election first. The assumption was that a Shagari win would increase the bandwagon vote for the NPN in subsequent elections. This outcome probably occurred, but overzealous manipulation of the elections and basic thuggery and intimidation by the NPN made it difficult to assess the true results. The NPN became the majority party in federal government, winning 61 seats in the Senate and 307 seats in the House; it also took gubernatorial positions in twelve states. Although internal power struggles lost the NPN some seats, its aggressive outward reach brought it many apparent gains beyond its traditional power bases. Such actions aroused strong responses in the southwest, particularly in the states of Oyo, Ondo, and Ogun. Civil disturbances in these states during the second half of 1983 made open conflict within the society more likely. In an article written at the time by Wole Soyinka, the author stated his belief “that a civil war has been set in motion by Shehu Shagari and the hierarchy of the NPN.”48

The combination of problems and internal unrest not only weakened the power and legitimacy of the NPN federal government but also led to concerns within the business and military elites. One influential group, often referred to as
the “Kaduna mafia,” had allegedly not supported Shagari’s candidacy in 1979, and so it easily mobilized northern business and military elites when economic chaos loomed. On 31 December 1983, the military moved against the administration in a swift and almost bloodless action, ushering in a period of military rule that has proved to be the longest in the country’s history.


Leadership was taken over by General Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim northerner, with Tunde Idiagbon as second-in-command. Some of the leading figures of the civilian government were tried for corruption and other related offenses, but the president and vice-president were excluded from these proceedings—a fact that did not win favor in many parts of the country. Many politicians fled the country, finding it relatively easy to slip through the hands of the military.

Buhari, from Katsina, was very closely linked to the northern establishment. Economic policies implemented under Buhari exhibited few substantive differences from those implemented by the deposed NPN, although the military’s aim was to bring some order and stability to an economy that had spiraled out of control. In addition, it wished to bring more order to society as a whole.

In line with this objective, new programs were launched to bring discipline and probity to society, although the military itself was often found wanting on both counts. The most significant of these programs was the War Against Indiscipline (WAI)—later revamped as the National Orientation Movement (NOM)—which attempted the micromanagement of social relations by forcing Nigerians into orderly queues, promoting work ethics, developing patriotism and nationalism, pushing anticorruption drives, and promoting environmental sanitation, which often came down to cleaning the streets. The program and its later manifestations had little impact on the average lifestyle, although some cities were temporarily made cleaner; moreover, it brought no noticeable change to the way in which the elite operated. It did, however, pressure the poor and underemployed who were trying to survive on the fringes of society by hampering their lifestyle and work “on the street.”

Perhaps of more political significance was the harshness with which the military acted against civil society, a trend accentuated by later military regimes. The political elite was excluded from activity, but the government also clamped down on media freedoms through harsh decrees and arrested many journalists for the most trivial of offenses. For example, the well-known social critic and musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was jailed for five years on a spurious foreign-currency violation. Meanwhile, the National Security Organisation ran rampant, investigating and interrogating people across the full spectrum of society, including senior military officers. This repression was an excessive attempt to bring stability after the
problems of the Second Republic, provoking popular opposition and creating its own form of instability. Opposition to Buhari’s authoritarianism, combined with the country’s poor economic performance, prompted Babangida to remove Buhari and Idiagbon from office in a palace coup in late 1985, and to attempt to stabilize the country with the promise of less oppression and a more open stance to government.

**Babangida and the Long Transition: 1985–1993**

Babangida had been a high-ranking military officer for many years, playing a major role in the coups d’état of 1975 and 1983. He had also served as a member of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Murtala/Obasanjo and Buhari administrations and thus had significant experience of government. An indigene from the middle belt, Babangida worked hard to gain greater popular support, attempting to distance himself from Buhari. One of Babangida’s first moves was to loosen the military’s iron grip on the press, at least in the short term, and the president went to great lengths to stress his human rights orientation. He disbanded the NSO and, in its place, established three agencies: the Defence Intelligence Agency, the Nigerian Intelligence Agency, and the State Security Services. Babangida disbanded the SMC, converted it to the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), and increased its membership significantly to draw in diverse ethnic representation.

In 1986, Babangida supported a public debate on the merits of seeking an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan as a means of releasing tensions within society and then gave the appearance of having been swayed to reject the loan by the pressures of “public opinion.” He also sought favor by preparing a timetable for the return to civilian government, setting an initial date of October 1990.

Babangida’s considerable political skills, combined with his judicious calls for recivilianization, gained him support and earned him the nickname “Maradona,” after the Argentinean soccer player of that name, who was known for his devious but excellent skills. And yet negative trends visible in the early administration gave portents of a dismal future. The ruthless way in which Babangida dealt with coup plotters in 1985 forewarned that he would rule with an iron fist. Included among those executed was Mamman Vatsa, a close school friend from Bida Government College and best man at Babangida’s wedding. The assassination in 1986 of *Newswatch* editor Dele Giwa raised widespread suspicion, never confirmed, that the security forces were behind his death. The increasing harassment of journalists was an indication of Babangida’s desire not to allow too much criticism of the government. In 1988, Babangida proscribed the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) after the unions had consistently criticized the government and its economic policies on structural adjustment.

Such harsh actions would increase in intensity over the eight years that Babangida remained in office, and later under Abacha, perhaps indicating the growing disdain in which the military elite held mass society. It appeared that “the
Babangida personal rulership project was designed to accumulate all powers and dispense all patronage for as long as possible.\textsuperscript{51} Increasingly, the veneer of human rights and democratization rhetoric was peeled back to reveal a repressive president. The Civil Liberties Organisation described Babangida's "executive lawlessness" in these terms some two years before he aborted the transition: "The Babangida regime has exhibited utter disrespect for the judiciary, and it has threatened the maintenance of the rule of law, so essential to a civil society. All this comes from an administration that seized the reins of government on a platform of improving the human rights record of Nigeria.\textsuperscript{52}

Despite the apparent hostility to civil society, Babangida established a transition program for civilian rule patterned closely on that of Obasanjo's a decade earlier.\textsuperscript{53} At first the target date was set for October 1990, but it was quickly changed to October 1992, apparently to allow more time for a successful transition to occur. The program itself included the establishment in January 1986 of a seventeen-member Political Bureau, chaired by Professor Samuel Cookey, to investigate the "problems" of Nigerian politics and society through widespread consultation with the Nigerian people; it also included a constitutional conference and revamping of the constitution. A graduated program of elections began at the local level at the end of 1989 and would culminate in presidential elections in the third quarter of 1992, with a transfer of power in October of that year. The presidential elections eventually took place in June 1993, but the transfer of power never occurred.

The Political Bureau (or Politburo, as it became known) helped promote the most detailed and interesting discussion of Nigerian politics ever condoned by the military, receiving some 27,000 submissions from the public in the process. The military had the final word as to what was or was not adopted, but issues concerning ideology, states, federalism, ethnicity, and religion were all aired during the year that the bureau was at work. Except for two journalists and two labor leaders, the members of the committee were academics. Their discussions led to some interesting conclusions.

The government agreed with some of the bureau's key recommendations, notably the adoption of a two-party system, the rejection of the principle of zoning of offices, and the desire to maintain traditional rulers outside the structure of federal and state governments. The Cookey Committee opposed zoning (i.e., the rotation of government offices), arguing that it would amount "to an acceptance of our inability to grow beyond ethnic or state loyalty."\textsuperscript{54} The Abacha administration would later reverse this policy and enshrine zoning in the 1995–1998 transitional exercise. Babangida also accepted in principle the need to create new states, but he went beyond the bureau's recommendations by adding two and then a further six states, bringing the total to thirty states in August 1991 and unsettling the transition process by so doing.

One dramatic recommendation of the committee was rejected outright by Babangida, and that was to convert the country to socialist development: "Socio-economic power should be democratised through political and economic partici-
pation in all structures and organisations of power. The economy should be restructured largely along the socialist path with emphasis on self-reliance and social justice.”

Babangida also rejected the recommendation that 10 percent of seats be reserved for female and labor unionist candidates, as well as the majority view of the committee in favor of a unicameral legislature. The committee’s call for a “new political orientation” with mass mobilization was somewhat taken up by Babangida in his creation in July 1987 of the Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice, Self-Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER); however, like previous efforts, this organization did not really meet expectations.

Unfortunately, the support that Babangida cultivated within the population, including that of intellectuals and pro-democracy activists, soon dissipated. The president intervened time and again in the transition process to make sure that politicians surfacing were acceptable to the military leadership, a role that was perfected by Obasanjo and would be repeated by Abacha. Babangida’s initial justifications were that the “old-guard politicians” and “discredited practices” of the Second Republic were reemerging, but such arguments carried increasingly less weight as the transition progressed. As Shehu Othman and Gavin Williams have commented:

The idea of building a new democracy on a new generation relied on an extremely short memory: the “newbreeds” of the Second Republic had been even more corrupt than the “old guard” inherited from the First. By banning, unbanning and rebanning contestants, Babangida would exhaust his rivals and their “war chests” as they spent their way through successive rounds of elections. He could outlast them all, since he had the national exchequer at his disposal.

And William Reno notes that “durable networks of Old Brigades and Money Bags continue to exert significant influence over the two officially sanctioned political parties. . . . Contours of the new order show remarkable similarity to those of the old.”

Hardship resulting from structural adjustment, transition fatigue, and sheer apathy among the electorate unsettled the program; in particular, it alienated the professional and middle classes, whose support seemed essential. Furthermore, Babangida “failed to settle crucial underlying issues of economic dependence, political culture, and mass-based collectivity mobilisation.” The transition could never be deemed “democratic” since it was controlled by no fewer than fifty-seven military decrees, even apart from the fact that many “democrats” were excluded. That the transition occurred in such a complex environment “had much to do with the contradictory nature of the transition process: at once democratic and repressive; popular and elitist; novel and familiar; promising and depressing.”

Babangida refused to accept any of the six political associations that were vying for registration and had been nominally approved by the screening agency. These were the People’s Solidarity Party, the Nigerian National Congress, the People’s Front of Nigeria, the Liberal Convention, the Nigerian Labour Party, and the Republican Party of Nigeria. Babangida’s dislike of political parties was made
known in a government-owned publication where he was quoted as saying that parties "were natural grounds for the idle and illiterate who have over the years failed to qualify for any reputable profession."

Instead, Babangida created two artificial political parties allegedly to be built from the grassroots upward. This goal was immediately compromised when the military itself drew up the manifestos of both parties. Each manifesto was identically structured, but the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was to be more "progressive" and was to challenge the problems of "poverty, underdevelopment, ignorance, disease and technological dependency," helping the "birth of a new social order." The National Republican Convention (NRC) emphasized "employment opportunities for our youths" and believed in a "political economy erected substantially on individual initiative, open choices and free competitive markets."

Civilian elites were naturally upset; yet those continuing to harbor political ambitions had little option but to conform to the military's proscriptions—a function of the AGIP principle of working with "Any Government in Power." At a more substantial level, concerns were expressed as to how the country's diverse political landscape could be channeled into two parties.

Babangida charged the NRC to "lean a little to the right" of the ideological spectrum, and the SDP to "lean a little to the left." Babangida's argument was that the other associations were simply replicas of previous ethnic-based parties and that having a two-party system would break the pattern of ethnicity. This departure from ethnicity did not occur, but existing political affiliations were nevertheless channeled into just two camps. In time, the NRC became loosely associated with the far north establishment and southern minorities, and the SDP with political sentiments of the south and northern dissident elements—again reemphasizing the traditional pattern of politics.

In 1989, nonparty elections were held at the local level under the auspices of the National Electoral Commission (NEC). Then, in December 1990, elections based on the open-ballot principle between the two parties were held at the local level, with both parties fairly evenly sharing the spoils. State Assembly and gubernatorial elections were held in December 1991. The NRC won sixteen states and the SDP fourteen at the governor level, and their fortunes were reversed for the assemblies. During the elections of July 1992, the SDP gained control of both federal houses of the National Assembly, winning 52 Senate and 314 House of Representatives seats. Assembly representatives were finally sworn into office in December 1992, working with a Transitional Council within which was designated the head of government, Chief Ernest Adegunle Shonekan. The military reformed itself into the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), and worked with the Transitional Council to try to bridge the civilian and military leaderships while awaiting the presidential elections and ultimate transfer of power. The National Assembly was precluded from legislating on finance, defense, and security during the transition, indicating that power rested firmly with the military.
The presidential election proved more difficult for the military to accomplish to its satisfaction, providing evidence of a desire not to relinquish power. Events during 1992 and 1993 tipped the balance against Babangida, resulting in his portrayal as someone clinging to power by any means possible, possessing a “hidden agenda,” being reluctant to allow civilians into office, and turning the transition into a “transfiction.” In 1992 both parties held conventions to select their presidential candidates and their running mates for the December elections. The military backed down from its blanket ban on previous politicians standing for office, reflecting the pressure it was under from political forces in the country, or perhaps simply looking for ways to confuse the political process even further.

Both parties successfully accomplished their goal of selecting candidates. The NRC selected Adamu Ciroma, the former secretary-general of the NPN, from twelve candidates, whereas the SDP picked Shehu Yar’Adua, a retired general from the Obasanjo era, from thirty-six candidates. Babangida claimed to be unhappy because both presidential candidates were northerners, and so he blocked the election. The parties were then forced to select new candidates, again having little option but to play to the tune of the military. The NRC picked Bashir Othman Tofa, a former NPN cabinet minister, with Dr. Sylvester Ugo as his running mate. The SDP presidential candidate was Alhaji Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (“MKO”) Abiola, a Muslim Yoruba southerner and publishing tycoon, with Babangana Kingibe selected as the vice-presidential candidate.

The presidential election was held on 12 June 1993, following the rejection of a last-minute judicial intervention by the Association for a Better Nigeria (ABN), a pro-Babangida group led by Chief Arthur Nzeribe, to have the election postponed. According to accounts from domestic and international observers, the election was fair; but the results were embroiled in court battles (again led by the ABN) and never fully published at the national level, although they had all been published at the local level. On the basis of what is known, it appears that the election was won handsomely by Abiola, who gained 8.4 million votes or 58 percent of the total of 14.1 million votes cast (a low turnout). Specifically, he won nineteen of thirty states, including the “radical” northern state of Kano, reflecting a breakthrough north-south alliance and a good level of support across the country. Abiola had started his career as an accountant with International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) and was responsible for lucrative telephone contracts. As he built his wealth, he developed close connections to Babangida, carefully courted the military as a whole, and apparently won 97 percent of the military’s vote in the election.

However, the military leadership, and especially the far northern elite, was unhappy at the prospect of losing power to a southerner (albeit a Muslim), and there were fears that more radical members of the SDP would push for an account of the financial activities of the military. Dismissing domestic and international acceptance of the result, the military government argued that irregularities had marred the election, and it annulled the result on 23 June 1993.
Babangida, by many accounts, tried to bribe National Assembly representatives to vote to extend his government, and then made it appear that he had kept his promise by leaving office on 27 August 1993, the eighth anniversary of his accession to power. He installed a thirty-two-member Interim National Government (ING) under Shonekan until fresh elections could be held in February 1994. A new transition date was set at 31 March 1994, although uncertainty remained as to which civilian groups would be willing to fight the elections.

Intense pressures within the military elite, combined with opposition from the press and prodemocracy groups, helped force Babangida out. The transition exercise had proved to be a massive waste of resources. Two serious coup attempts against him in December 1985 and April 1990—both brutally suppressed—reflected the level of division within the military as well as the opposition directed against Babangida. But in 1993 the power shifted within the elite circle to Sani Abacha, Babangida’s deputy from the far north and the defence minister and vice-chair of the ING. Abacha was an apparent supporter of Tofa in the election and the only military member of the transitional government. Behind him was a powerful group of northern officers, including Brigadier Hailu Akilu, head of National Intelligence, who was quoted as saying that “Abiola will only become president over my dead body.” But it would be oversimplistic to argue that this move was orchestrated to protect “northern” interests, as Abacha also had southern officers in his inner court. The ING attempted some economic reforms to maintain the support of the international community, but its weaknesses were cruelly exposed when it was ousted from office in a military coup on 17 November 1993.

The Abacha Regime: 1993–Present

General Sani Abacha had helped orchestrate Babangida’s takeover of government in 1985, had served as second-in-command during Babangida’s tenure of office, and had obviously collaborated on controlling the transition exercise. Abacha’s own takeover occurred after an oil workers strike in September in favor of president-elect Abiola had rocked the country, and after a judicial ruling had declared the ING unconstitutional. Another likely reason for Abacha’s takeover was his hope to preempt a junior officers’ coup led by southern officers; Abacha’s name was allegedly high on the list for assassination. Abacha was initially welcomed by many in the country because he offered some hope of a quick transfer of power to civilians rather than another long, drawn-out transition. Some prodemocracy supporters wanted to challenge Abacha; others were drafted into prominent positions in the new government, helping to encourage, confuse, and divide the prodemocracy groups—a fairly successful tactic on the part of all military governments to date.

Among the prominent politicians to join the military were the SDP’s vice-president, Babangana Kingibe, who became foreign minister; the SDP’s president of the
Senate, Iyorchia Ayu; and Lateef Jakande and Abubakar Rimi, both populist governors of Lagos (UPN) and Kano (PRP), respectively, during the Second Republic. Alex Ibru, owner of the respected and critical *Guardian* chain of newspapers, was also co-opted into government. It was widely reported that Abiola himself made recommendations to Abacha, thereby weakening his own claims to the presidency and subverting the democratic cause. Abiola had also apparently been told of the impending coup against the ING, and had supported it. It was difficult to avoid the conclusion that these decisions to join the military government were based on opportunism, symptomatic of the morally challenged political elite, although each of the individuals involved claimed a great desire to serve his country.

Hopes that military rule would be short-lived soon evaporated, as Abacha moved to full-scale military control and canceled all plans for a return to civilian government. Most civilian cabinet members were removed within a year or so, and Abacha cultivated the habit of firing his top military advisers and governors at regular intervals. The military instituted repressive action against all forms of opposition to its rule and acted especially harshly against the media. Prodemocracy groups, which had grown under Babangida’s rule, were severely intimidated and harassed, and many leaders left the country to establish movements in exile. Trade unions were pressured into submission, and it became a treasonable act to talk of Abiola. Abacha also divided the opposition by identifying Abiola as a spokesman of the Yoruba, thus distancing many northerners from him and weakening the pressure against the military government.

The main device for Abacha’s intimidation was the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree No. 2 of 1994. Under this decree, a detainee had no right to be informed of the reasons for his or her detention and no right of access to family, doctors, or lawyers; and he or she could be detained indefinitely without charge or trial. Furthermore, the courts were denied any jurisdiction over these cases. All such terms were in clear violation of international law.

Abacha’s decision to renege on returning the country to civilian rule, combined with economic policies that reversed structural adjustment, led to only mild rebuke and sanctions from the international community, further encouraging him to maintain an iron grip on the country. In June 1994, Abiola celebrated the anniversary of his “victory” by proclaiming himself president, only to be promptly arrested and accused of treason, though not brought to trial over the next three years. The Federal High Court ruled in October 1994 that his detention was illegal, and the Federal Court of Appeal granted him unconditional bail in November 1994. The military ignored these and other rulings. The assassination of his prodemocracy activist wife, Kudirat Abiola, in June 1996 added to the intimidation directed against Abiola himself. Initially, the military accused Abiola’s family members of the killing, but nobody was charged. Prodemocracy groups claim to have evidence that the security forces were involved.

Two events during 1995 raised the political tempo. The first, which occurred in February, was an alleged attempted coup that served as the pretext to round up
300 officers in a purge of the military. Among those imprisoned were Olusegun Obasanjo, the former head-of-state; Shehu Yar’Adua, his deputy, and erstwhile SDP presidential candidate; and Beko Ransome-Kuti, founder of the Campaign for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) and, later, the Campaign for Democracy (CD). Pressure increased following the second event in November 1995, when nine Ogoni dissidents (the Ogoni Nine), including the author Ken Saro-Wiwa, were executed for allegedly inciting murder; but it was clear that the military was sending out a strong message to all opponents of the government. Other Ogoni dissidents (the Ogoni Nineteen) remained in detention in 1997 for the same offense.

In an attempt to deflect considerable external and internal pressure, Abacha laid out tentative plans in October 1995 for a three-year transition to civilian rule (see Table 4.2). Few were receptive to this extended program or believed it would be adhered to.

The United States and the European Union maintained sanctions against the administration, but stopped well short of oil sanctions, the only ones really able to pressure the military. Abacha rightly concluded that he could sit out Western pressures against his regime and at the same time control dissident pressures from within.79 He had established a National Constitutional Conference (NCC) in June 1994—postponed from January—to discuss the possible permutations of government, but the NCC operated in a more controlled environment than previous similar bodies. The NCC contained a number of prominent political personalities, including those with reservations about the Abacha government, such as Ken Saro-Wiwa and Shehu Yar’Adua. The conference did not really get to the key issues of the country’s political development, but it did step out of line and call for civilian government by 1 January 1996. It was quickly forced to retreat from that stance by the military. The serious issue of the status and possible future role of president-elect Abiola was never fully debated. Promulgation of the constitution was delayed until 1998, apparently owing to severe disagreements within the military leadership over the future size of the military and civilian control over it. Copies of the new constitution were virtually impossible to obtain, in complete contrast to previous constitutions.

Abacha clearly had his own plans as to how a new political structure for the country might be constituted. These plans included a decision to promote, after 1998, a French-style hybrid political system of joint presidential and parliamentary government. In addition, the zoning of senior offices was to be instituted whereby the country would be organized into six regions, each of which would rotate six senior positions in government.80 The regions listed were northeast, northwest, middle belt, southwest, east-central, and southern minorities. In turn, the senior positions to be rotated were president, vice-president, prime minister, deputy prime minister, senate president, and house speaker. According to one supporter, such “zoning constitutes a way of overcoming the cleavages of ethnicity, regionalism and religion such that each of Nigeria’s component units is pro-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Events</th>
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| 1995 | 3rd | October to December  
Approval of draft constitution; lifting of ban on political activities; establishment of a National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON); creation of Transition Implementation Committee, National Reconciliation Committee, and Federal Character Commission; appointment of panel for the creation of states and local-government boundary adjustments. |
| 1996 | 1st | January to March  
Election and inauguration of local government councils on a “nonparty” basis. |
|      | 2nd | April to June  
Creation of states and local governments; commencement of political party registration. |
|      | 3rd | July to September  
Registration of political parties; delineation of constituencies; production of an authentic voters' register. |
|      | 4th | October to December  
Election of local-government councils at party level; sitting of local-government election tribunals and conduct of by-elections. |
| 1997 | 1st | January to March  
Inauguration of party-elected local-government councils; consolidation of new political party structures. |
|      | 2nd | April to June  
Party state primaries to select candidates for the state assembly and governorship elections; screening and approval of candidates by NECON. |
|      | 3rd | July to September  
State assembly elections; sitting of state election tribunals and conduct of by-elections. |
|      | 4th | October to December  
Election of state governors; sitting of state election tribunals and conduct of by-elections. |
| 1998 | 1st | January to March  
Inauguration of state assemblies and swearing-in of state governors; party primaries to select candidates for National Assembly elections; National Assembly election campaigns. |
|      | 2nd | April to June  
National Assembly elections; sitting of National Assembly election tribunals and conduct of by-elections; primaries to select candidates for presidential elections; commencement of nationwide campaign for the presidential elections. |
|      | 3rd | July to September  
Presidential elections |
|      |      | October 1, 1998  
Swearing-in of newly elected president and final disengagement by the armed forces. |

vided with the opportunity to produce a president of the nation."81 However, according to democracy advocates such as Julius Ihonvbere, "[w]ithout enabling civil society to accommodate popular interests, it is doubtful if the mere multiplication of political positions and the rotation of power will lead to genuine democratisation."82 A general fear was that rotational power sharing would lead to a deepening of regional rather than national identification.

There was little specific detail provided as to the exact mechanics of zoning but much discussion as to why it was being adopted. Elites from the far north were thought to oppose zoning because it would mean relinquishing power. Other observers, conversely, saw it as a ploy to maintain northern domination because opposition could be limited, defused, and confused through rotation. However, a focus simply on northern elites could not fully address the complexity of the political situation. In October 1996, Abacha did create six new states (which brought the total to thirty-six), thus making the rotation and zoning mathematically simpler and feasible: six offices to be rotated around six regions, each of which would contain six states. Abacha announced that this political structure would operate for a trial period of thirty years, thereby allowing each office to be rotated for one five-year term. As no civilian government has lasted much longer than five years in office, few took the thirty-year program seriously.

There remained doubts as to whether Abacha would go through with the transfer to civilian government. Some speculated that he would find various reasons to hang on to power, such as the prospect of standing for election himself; but the picture was clouded by unsubstantiated rumors, circulating in 1997, that he was suffering from liver cancer. At the end of 1997, all the political parties were calling on Abacha to run in the presidential election on 1 August 1998. The uncertainty of Abacha's status helped to stifle the campaigning of other possible presidential candidates.

Abiola remained in detention, and the government's refusal to discuss his future continued to pose a serious political problem. It was unknown whether Abiola wanted to remain in the political arena, perhaps taking part in some transitional government, or whether he would agree to remain outside of politics as the price to be paid for freedom. He remained firmly in detention at the end of 1997.

The transition program began with the lifting of the ban on political activity in June 1995, although restrictions on assembly remained in force and nonparty elections proceeded at the local-government level in March 1996. Only five days of campaigning were allowed, and the elections took place under the open-ballot mechanism. Abacha decreed that anyone elected whom the military did not like would be removed, making a mockery of democracy and casting grave doubts on the military's overall intentions. The military registered five political parties in October 1996 to contest the upcoming elections in 1997 and 1998. These parties were considered centrist in scope and philosophy, and their leaders were all pro-Abacha: Indeed, they were widely perceived as being "like five fingers of the same hand." In short, the parties presented little or no challenge to the dominant philoso-
phy and ideology of the military elite. The parties in question were the Committee for National Consensus (CNC), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), and the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP). Ten parties were not approved, including the Social Progressive Party linked to Abiola's SDP and the People's Progressive Party tied to one of the major pro-democracy movements.

All aspiring politicians were carefully screened and vetted, and those who posed any form of challenge to the military were simply excluded. Many Nigerians were distressed by this "guided" or "gun-powered" democracy, which indicated the military's desire and ability to influence political life after its departure, should it decide to leave. The National Electoral Commission (NECON), established in December 1995 to supervise the electoral process, was widely considered to lack impartiality and to be insufficiently strong to withstand military meddling. The northern elite still appeared to control key ministries of the government as well as the main economic agencies. In February 1997, there were significant problems with voter registration, and accompanying violence. Business as usual seemed the order of the day, although Abacha adamantly stated, in his independence anniversary speech in October 1997, that the transition was proceeding "smoothly."

Democracy and Human Rights

It is pertinent to note that there was little reason to establish democracy and civil liberty groups prior to the 1987 creation of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) because, on the whole, successive military governments did not impinge heavily or menacingly on the rights of ordinary citizens. Ironically, these groups flourished during the Babangida administration, which removed Buhari ostensibly to protect civil liberties but, in fact, unleashed increasingly repressive actions against the populace.

Hostility to democracy and civil liberty groups has increased during the 1990s to the extent that many of their members operate from exile and others languish in jail. One of the most blatant acts of repression was directed against the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which formed in October 1990 as a hybrid environmental-political rights grassroots pressure group, the first of its kind in the country. Its Bill of Rights, published in 1990, called for autonomy, the protection of Ogoni culture, and protection from environmental degradation. The successful mobilization of 300,000 demonstrators at Bori in January 1993, along with other displays of activism and calls for a bigger share of federal revenue, provoked sufficient unease among the military that excessive force has been and continues to be used in the region to subdue the Ogoni.

The Ogoni comprise about 500,000 people on 650 square kilometers of land in the Delta region, but that land accounts for more than two-thirds of the country's oil wells. Drilling, spillage, and flaring have decimated the local environment, and
little investment has been made in the region. Literacy stands at about 10 percent of the adult population; and unemployment, at about 85 percent. MOSOP called for compensation from the government and Shell of over $300 billion: The response was brutal, with hundreds of Ogoni killed or imprisoned. Ethnic tensions with neighboring Andoni and Okrika also flared up, with hundreds dead; many suspected government agitation.  

In May 1994, four progovernment Ogoni leaders were killed by a mob, and nine MOSOP leaders, including the author Ken Saro-Wiwa, were detained and charged with incitement to murder. After a trial by Special Military Tribunal in Port Harcourt involving flagrant abuse of the judicial process, the Ogoni Nine were found guilty and swiftly executed in November 1995. These events occurred immediately prior to the Commonwealth Summit in Auckland, New Zealand, bringing immediate diplomatic attacks upon the military and leading to the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth. Inside the country, the military has been able to ride out the pressure, partly because the Ogoni people have little domestic support outside their region.

The execution of the Ogoni Nine “highlighted the Abacha regime’s apparent indifference to international human rights standards and generated much concern, both locally and internationally, about the future of the Nigerian federation.” Consequently, “[i]n reaction to top-down democratization initiatives, a challenge to democracy as an ideology of domination has emerged from the mobilisation of social movements seeking to reassert popular control. . . . The new social movements advance the idea that development is a human right whose achievement requires popular participation and control.” However, it is not just political activists who are held hostage by a vicious government: Women and children have also been victimized, and many thousands of ordinary citizens are held in jail for years under inhumane conditions, simply awaiting trial.

Although many groups have developed over the past decade and are in basic agreement in support of civil liberties and a return to civilian rule, there are significant differences in scope. There appears to be little agreement over the definition of democracy, whether it means western-style liberal democracy, elitist democracy, or some alternative. Claude Ake has highlighted these questions as follows: “In order for African democracy to be relevant and sustainable it will have to be radically different from liberal democracy. For one thing, it will have to de-emphasize abstract political rights and stress concrete economic rights, because the demand for democracy in Africa draws much of its impetus from the prevailing economic conditions within.”

The controlled transfer of power from a military elite to a civilian elite is not really an exercise in democracy. Empirical evidence shows that a new civilian government is likely to replicate the characteristics of the military government that ceded power to it, as “the nature of the preexisting regime shapes the dynamics and outcomes of political transitions,” and the character of the regime affects how much liberty the opposition has in which to mobilize. On that basis, little can be expected
of a civilian regime brokered by Abacha. Holding elections, as Richard Sandbrook has pointed out, does not automatically foster a spirit of democracy in the country, especially when the elections are open to manipulative influences,\textsuperscript{90} or when democratization occurs in a harsh economic environment.\textsuperscript{91} And social forces in Nigeria, particularly ethnicity, do not necessarily conform to Western models of democracy, in which class consciousness often forms the basis for political parties.\textsuperscript{92} Furthermore, focusing on elitist demands for democracy may not create true democracy unless domestic society is restructured and the masses are “empowered.”\textsuperscript{93}

Differences exist in the organizational structures of these prodemocracy movements, with some groups dominated by an intellectual elite and others striving (albeit unsuccessfully) for more grassroots support, a process not fully understood.\textsuperscript{94} Further divisions exist because of personality differences or ethnic variations among the groups, many of which have been labeled as “southern” or Yoruba by northern elites and the government. Yoruba groups are especially hostile to the current transition, regarding the theft of Abiola’s victory as yet another attack on them. In Igboland, Ojukwu has resurfaced as a key representative, supporting Abacha’s concept of rotational power sharing and opposing Abiola’s claims to the presidency. Widespread apathy toward politicians and the electoral process also makes it difficult for prodemocracy groups to enlist support among the population for their movements.

The growth in numbers of these groups over the last ten years reflects a healthy tendency toward democracy, but the proliferation has caused practical problems in terms of coordination and networking of movements as well as duplications of effort. In short, differing philosophies between the groups make it difficult to combine their efforts. A study by Raufu Mustapha\textsuperscript{95} distinguished six categories of civil rights and prodemocracy groups, with many movements in each category. The categories were as follows: (1) civil rights groups, such as the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) and the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP) (eight groups in total); (2) prodemocracy movements, including the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) and the National Conscience Party (NCP) founded by Gani Fawehinmi (thirty-two groups); (3) special-interest groups, such as the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), Women in Nigeria (WIN), and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) (seventeen groups); (4) unions and churches, such as the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) (fourteen groups); (5) external groups, such as MOSOP-UK, the National Liberation Council of Nigeria (NALICON) formed by Wole Soyinka, and the National Democratic Coalition–Abroad (fifteen groups); and (6) umbrella groups, such as the Campaign for Democracy (CD), the United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDFN), the Democratic Alternative (DA), and the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) (six groups).
The harassment of these groups increased during the later stages of the Babangida administration and has remained intense during the Abacha era. Many leaders have been detained by the military for various lengths of time; others have felt more secure operating from outside the country. Apparent coup attempts in 1992 and 1995 provided grounds for the widespread roundup of prodemocracy activists as well as critical elements within the military itself.

By 1996 Human Rights Watch had documented the cases of dozens of government opponents who were languishing in jail, either convicted of treason by military tribunal or held without charge, and many more were in exile outside the country. Those detained included Moshood Abiola, president-elect from 1993; Olusegun Obasanjo, former head-of-state; Shehu Yar’Adua, Obasanjo chief of staff and erstwhile SDP presidential candidate; Christine Anyanwu, editor of The Sunday Magazine; Ben Charles Obi, editor of Weekend Classique; Kunle Ajibade, editor of The News; George Mbah, assistant editor of Tell; Beko Ransome-Kuti, Shehu Sani, Femi Falana, and Kebir Ahmed, all members of the CD; Chima Ubani of the CLO; Frank Kokori of NUPENG; and Gani Fawehinmi and Femi Aborisade of the NCP. In 1997, following a spate of bombings across the country, the government accused an additional fourteen prodemocracy activists of treason, including Wole Soyinka and Anthony Enahoro, and so the pattern of intimidation continued. Another nineteen Ogoni languished in jail under charges similar to those leading to the execution of the Ogoni Nine. In August 1997, the latter started a hunger strike to draw attention to their plight.

Prodemocracy groups have been frozen out of the Abacha transition program (an irony in itself in the “democratic transition”), and politicians scrambling for acceptance by the military are willing to go along with whatever the military determines are the rules of the game. On that basis, the next civilian government will not provide the fully democratic alternative to the military for which many prodemocracy groups are calling.

In February 1996, Chief Anthony Enahoro of NADECO laid down the basis for discussions about the democratic transition in the country, and the issues that were considered remained valid during 1997. They concerned the release of Chief Abiola, the creation of a government of reconciliation and national unity, and free elections. It is difficult to see how Abacha’s transition program can be supported by the bulk of the prodemocracy movements, so the new civilian government (if one should emerge in October 1998) will have little credibility and, arguably, little stability.

Conclusion: Elusive Stability

This chapter has documented the endemic instability of the Nigerian polity and the perpetuation of military rule. The instability emanates from a variety of factors: the colonial legacy of federalism and heightened ethnicity, the failure of civilian elites to run government fairly and efficiently, the moral ineptitude and
corrupt practices of civilian and military elites alike, and the seeming inability to inculcate democratic values into power structures.

Since the overthrow of the last civilian government in 1983, the military has entrenched itself in power, merely toying with notions of a civilian transition. It is a challenge to understand fully the military’s disdain for human rights and the democratic process. Clearly the military is aware that civil society is too weak and apathetic to resist; and Western society, too protective of its own interests to intervene. It has also recognized its own superiority and ability to rule, as well as its more basic desire to maintain access to the financial benefits of the state. Its increasing willingness to use force to intimidate opponents has consolidated its grip on society, but has also effectively led to a postponement of true debate on the political fabric of the nation.

None of Nigeria’s long-term political problems have really been addressed by the Abacha administration. Tensions between the military and civilians, and within the military itself, remain high. An attempted coup by senior officers in December 1997, followed by a purge of officers by Abacha, provide indications of current instability. Attempts to create grassroots democracy have been blocked by military opposition, and politicians involved in the transition appear to be motivated primarily by personal ambition. Ethnic and religious tensions also remain high, aggravated by chronic economic conditions and manipulation by political and military elites. The military continues to confuse the principle of “unity” with that of “uniformity.” For how long can the military undermine democratization and still expect Nigerians to retain some level of civic pride? As Sam Oyovbaire, a former chairman of the Nigerian Political Science Association and Minister of Information under Abacha, has concluded: “So although we have 36 years of existence as a nation, and we are together (we thank God for that), the basic norms and values that inform a republican country are still not there. At least we are still very much an embryo.”

It is unclear whether the military is honest in its intentions to return to civilian rule in October 1998. The “transition” has been occurring since 1985, a long period by anybody’s standards. External pressures are not serious enough to threaten the Abacha regime, and billions of dollars in new international investment in the oil and gas sectors provide a continuing lifeline to the government, either to promote “development” or to extend the predatory nature of the elite. What incentives can be offered to make the military withdraw? Recent lessons from the politics of South Korea, where previous presidents have been hauled before the courts, have certainly been learned by Nigeria’s military elite. But Abiola was probably as “safe” a president as the military elite could expect.

The failures of previous civilian governments to rule effectively are well known and, indeed, prompted the late Fela Kuti to coin the word democrazy. The political class is unlikely to force through reforms against the military; and prodemocracy groups, too weak to do so, are resigned to slow progress toward democratization. Accusations of treason against prominent and patriotic Nigerians are hardly con-
ducive to democracy, however defined. As Theophilus Danjuma, a retired general and government minister, has commented: "Nigeria is between the gunman (the military) and the conman (the politicians)." For this reason, the continuation of protracted instability within the domestic polity seems guaranteed.

**Notes**

1. The commonly accepted length of time for civilian government is ten years. However, a strict calculation would put this duration at nine years and six months. I am not including the Shonekan interim government of 1993 in the category of civilian governments, because it was created by the military for its own convenience.


7. Although Nigeria technically did not become a republic until 1963, the years 1960–1966 are normally referred to as encompassing the First Republic.


9. Obafemi Awolowo's lawyer was denied entrance to Nigeria, and Awolowo himself was imprisoned for ten years. He was pardoned and released along with his colleagues in August 1966 and became the commissioner for finance in Gowon's government. For a glowing commentary and biography, see Mazi Raphael D.A. Nwankwo, *The Bitterness of Politics and Awolowo's Last Appeal* (Kano: Ijideani Publishers, 1975).


12. Azikiwe would side with Biafra at the beginning of the civil war, writing its national anthem, but in 1968 he switched to the federal cause. For a pro-Zik biography, see Kolawole Balogun, *My Country Nigeria* (Ibadan: Africanus, 1971).


17. Nzeogwu, though Igbo, was born in Kaduna, spoke fluent Hausa, and lived in the mid-west.


32. Tom Forrest, *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), p. 57. Billy Dudley also gives a similar report on this scandal, though with higher figures. According to Dudley, the tonnage was ten times the handling capacity, and 450 ships were waiting off port. See Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*, p. 81.

33. A later commission under Murtala Muhammed would find ten of the twelve governors guilty of corruption.


49. This phrase has been widely used to designate northern business and military elites who, through informal meetings and channels, seek to influence government. Specific individuals within the “Kaduna mafia” have never really been identified, nor are they believed to meet one another or even to live in Kaduna. In this context the term *mafia* refers to a secret group; it does not connote any criminal linkages to the Italian mafia.


53. See the *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 28(3), November 1990, an edition devoted entirely to the Nigerian transition.


55. *Report of the Political Bureau*, Section 5.069.
56. *Newswatch*, 5 October 1992, pp. 15–17. One publication that was supportive of MAMSER and tried to evoke its spirit was Nduka Nwagbo’s *The Vote* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1992).


65. Rather than casting a secret ballot, voters line up behind a photograph of the candidate of their choice, and a head-count is made.


68. ‘Bayo Williams is often credited with having coined this term.


70. There were no “official” international observers at these elections.

71. During the Abacha administration the ABN re-formed as the National Democratic Alliance. Officially led by Babangida and Nzeribe, it was believed to be interested in furthering Babangida’s political aspirations.

72. *New African*, September 1993, p. 13. Akilu was also said to have been involved in business with Tofa.


79. Oil revenues have increased the federal government’s ability to restrain civil society and maintain a tight centralized grip on political life, unlike the situation in other African states where NGO activity has altered the political landscape. In this connection, see Eve Sandberg (ed.), The Changing Politics of Non-Governmental Organizations and African States (Westport: Praeger, 1994).
80. The NCC had recommended only three regions.


97. *New African*, April 1997, p. 24; and March 1997, p. 20. Nobody was arrested for these bombings, which were apparently quite sophisticated exercises.


Nigeria’s economy is one of Africa’s biggest, a fact that partially explains the country’s political significance. With an area of 357,000 square miles (924,000 square kilometers), Nigeria is not particularly large by African standards, but its 100 million people make it the largest demographically, providing a sizable workforce and domestic market. Variable climates ranging from sparsely populated Sahelian and savanna conditions in the north to densely populated rain forest in the south have had an impact on the range of agricultural products harvested. Colonialism, too, had a significant impact on agricultural production, marketing, and exports, which in turn influenced the shape of the emerging political economy.¹

During the 1960s, a combination of factors contributed to a dramatic shift of economic profile, and agriculture was replaced by petroleum as the mainstay of the economy, in terms of both export revenues and attracting foreign investment—though, importantly, not in terms of employment. By the mid-1990s, Nigeria was the eighth largest producer of petroleum in the world, though only the thirtieth in gas production (and fourth in Africa behind Algeria, Libya, and Egypt). After 2000 and into the foreseeable future, the greater utilization of large-scale liquefied natural gas (LNG) reserves will further contribute to the immense importance of these sectors. Unfortunately, social indicators reflecting the quality of life for the average citizen remain poor. Half of the population lives below the poverty line of $1 a day, and the country’s literacy and infant mortality rates are among the lowest in the world.

Although petroleum has annually accounted for more than 90 percent of export revenues and 80 percent of government revenues over the past two decades, there was a very different economic picture before the 1970s. It is useful to con-
sider briefly the changing composition of the Nigerian economy during this century to understand the interplay of domestic and global markets.  

**Agriculture**

Prior to contact with European traders, most farmers were involved in subsistence agriculture or growing for a localized domestic market. Some exports of palm oil from the south and leather from the north also occurred, but these were not significant in terms of the overall structure of the economy. As contact with Europeans increased along the coast, so did the trade in slaves. During the nineteenth century, with the growth of British authority in the area, other items for trade developed as slavery became officially outlawed, although it was still tolerated inside the region. The full occupation of Nigeria at the turn of the twentieth century led colonial officers to deal with the problem of how to pay for the occupation in the absence of substantial funding from the metropole. Three crops emerged as highly beneficial exports. These were groundnuts grown in the north, cocoa in the west, and palm oil in the east. European companies were given great latitude in controlling the trade and shipping of those commodities to markets in Europe, and African entrepreneurs were largely excluded from this trade.

The development of regional commodity boards in the 1940s provided the newly developed regional governments with an economic identity and financial base, and revenues generated by underpaying farmers were drawn off from those boards to become a critical resource for embryonic political organizations in the 1950s. Yet despite these political maneuvers, agricultural earnings continued to grow, precipitating not only a growth in services and manufacturing in the post–World War II era but also a trend toward urbanization. At independence, agriculture was dominant in the economy, in terms of both domestic and export activity. The country was the world’s largest exporter of groundnuts and palm oil, and the second largest exporter of cocoa, and these three commodities contributed 70 percent of the country’s export earnings. During the 1950s, in contrast, mineral production accounted for only 1 percent of GDP.

These three products—groundnuts, cocoa, and palm oil—remained preeminent exports during the 1960s. At independence, they accounted for 61 percent of export revenue; but the civil war took a significant toll, particularly on palm oil production, and by 1970 the figure had fallen to 25 percent. Petroleum exploration increased throughout the decade and was an important incentive for the Biafrans during the war, but it was not until after the war’s end that oil exploration developed at an unprecedented pace. The rise in the fortunes of petroleum led to a relative decline in the importance of the agricultural sector, which in 1974 contributed less than 10 percent of export revenues. However, earnings remained strong for cocoa and palm kernels, and agriculture still employed 64 percent of the workforce. (For data on the relative importance of agriculture within the economy during the 1980s and 1990s, see Table 5.1.)
TABLE 5.1  Gross Domestic Product by Activity, Relative to Constant Prices in 1984 (in millions of naira)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>1987</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing</td>
<td>23,799</td>
<td>29,389</td>
<td>35,277</td>
<td>37,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>10,155</td>
<td>9,088</td>
<td>11,911</td>
<td>13,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>4,926</td>
<td>5,963</td>
<td>7,361</td>
<td>7,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas, and water</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1,906</td>
<td>1,433</td>
<td>1,727</td>
<td>1,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale/retail and restaurants/hotels</td>
<td>9,089</td>
<td>10,299</td>
<td>11,967</td>
<td>13,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport/communication</td>
<td>2,897</td>
<td>3,011</td>
<td>3,110</td>
<td>3,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, insurance, business services</td>
<td>4,478</td>
<td>5,217</td>
<td>10,224</td>
<td>11,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and social services</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (from industries only)</td>
<td>58,401</td>
<td>65,426</td>
<td>82,746</td>
<td>89,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producers of government services</td>
<td>4,606</td>
<td>5,314</td>
<td>7,596</td>
<td>10,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total GDP</td>
<td>63,608</td>
<td>71,034</td>
<td>90,546</td>
<td>99,805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The prevailing view of agricultural production in Nigeria after the 1970s points to federal government disinterest and poor policies, as well as little incentive for long-term private investment. The petroleum boom led to a strengthening of the national currency, the naira, which in turn allowed for cheap imports of foodstuffs and a change in Nigerian eating habits. This situation helped to deter the export of agricultural products, thereby undercutting efforts by indigenous farmers. By 1983, food imports accounted for just under 20 percent of total imports, but by 1992 that figure had fallen back to the more normal level of 8 percent. The economic boom led to increased rural-urban migration, which drained productive labor from the countryside. Government intervention proved inept and led to disincentives to farmers.

During the 1970s, the government took a more direct role in agricultural planning, contributing to a more tenuous relationship between the state and farmers. Across the country, large-scale prestigious River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) were created to help production. But there is evidence indicating that these were very expensive and did not improve local food production as anticipated. Many argue that food production declined significantly, raising issues of food security and rendering “the Nigerian economy vulnerable and dependent on her outside markets.” In some instances, such as the Bakolori scheme in Sokoto State, popular resistance to government policy was widespread but brutally resisted by government forces.

Over the past decade, structural adjustment has led to less state involvement in the agricultural sector and greater incentives to small farmers. Those with access to capital have done well, although the impact on the typical small farmer has been marginal. Particularly in the north, land has been acquired by members of
the elite—retired generals, civil servants, and government members—and a greater level of capitalist-style farming has emerged. An emphasis on self-sufficiency and the problem of securing adequate imports have combined to bring such industries as breweries, soft-drink manufacturers, and soap and textile producers into local agricultural production to supply their own enterprises—a trend that has had fair success. The World Bank's emphasis on export diversification has led to incentives for cash crop exports, particularly cocoa; but there is little evidence of success in this endeavor, despite the Bank's protestations.

Tom Forrest has challenged the predominant viewpoint on agriculture, claiming that the crisis has been exaggerated. According to government statistics, agriculture's contribution to GDP increased by 3.6 percent annually between 1980 and 1993, and by 2.4 percent in 1994, accounting in that year for 38.7 percent of GDP and 63.4 percent of the workforce. Of course, as with other statistics, these should be treated with caution.

Forrest's own research suggests that production may have kept up with population growth and that small farmers have remained very active. Contrary to common understanding, Forrest claims that the oil boom and urban demand helped stimulate agricultural production because of the rise of consumer prices. Although the overall government performance has been poor, it may not have been as pervasive as many authors have claimed.

Given the inadequacy of the statistics available, it is difficult to make a firm, nationwide assessment of agricultural development; for that reason one must consider localized examples instead. Much of the discussion in this area becomes embroiled in political rhetoric: Noting the inequalities in society and the different lifestyles of urban and rural dwellers, many analysts have concluded that rural peasants are being exploited by the elite. There are grounds to support such a conclusion; however, one must also be aware of the continuing resilience and occasional success of the agricultural sector.

Petroleum

The discovery of petroleum in the Niger Delta region proved to be both a blessing and a curse. The oil of this region was sought after because of its high quality and virtually sulfur-free content, but also because of the country's relative proximity to important markets in Western Europe and the United States, and the fact that the Niger Delta region was, at least initially, less politically volatile than the Middle East. Petroleum exploration began in the 1930s, but exports started as late as 1958 under British Petroleum–Shell. Within two years an export terminal was constructed at Bonny, and production reached 46,000 barrels a day (b/d) in 1961; but few observers at the time thought that the country would become a major exporter. As one commentator put it, oil "is the great question-mark." During the 1960s, oil production grew at the rate of 20 percent a year and, by the outbreak of the civil war, had reached 600,000 b/d, with offshore oil being developed by Gulf Oil.
Production was severely curtailed in the first two years of the war, but by 1969 it had bounced back to 540,000 b/d and a year later had leaped to 1.4 million b/d.

Nigeria joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1971, and burgeoning revenues provided a tremendous boost to development plans and helped the country recover from the costs and scars of the civil war. In 1974 alone, revenues grew more than three times the total of the previous year. New companies began to enter the market, notably Mobil, Texaco-Chevron, and Agip-Phillips. The government attempted to gain tighter control of pricing and income through the Petroleum Decree of November 1969, which took effect in 1971. However, its ability to control the oil corporations was much in doubt—and, in any case, such control was quite possibly not the intention, given the predation outlook of many government officials.15

Abroad, Nigerians asserted themselves more than ever before, and the government was courted by many Western suitors. Naira-diplomacy became a key element of continental policy, contributing to Nigeria's self-proclamation as the "African champion." The search for international status led successive governments to invest in lavish development projects and make generous donations to African causes. By the early 1980s, petroleum production was more than 2 million b/d and oil earnings accounted for 80 percent of federal revenues. Even during the 1980s and 1990s, when revenues declined, billions of dollars were still being derived from oil exports, placing the country in a much better economic position than most of its neighbors.

The downside of this phenomenal growth was that revenues contributed to "skewed" development. With money so easy to come by—oil revenues in the 1970s surpassed $100 billion—there was a massive rise in public spending and an increased number of public-sector parastatals. For the elite, this scenario represented an opportunity to gain unearned wealth, and access to that wealth came through government. Many projects were funded, an outcome that in the 1980s proved uneconomic and risky, highlighting the poor planning that had occurred. Three refineries were built—at Port Harcourt (in 1965), Warri (in 1978), and Kaduna (in 1980), and later a second refinery was added at Port Harcourt—to provide refined oil and associated materials for the domestic market; however, poor management and distribution caused endemic shortages across the country. The nominal refining capacity of Nigeria is 445,000 b/d, but that total is never achieved due to inefficiency and shutdowns of plants.

The sheer dynamism of the oil sector exacerbated the neglect of other areas of the economy, such as agriculture. Oil exploration and development also significantly contributed to the environmental damage in the Niger Delta region—damage that, today, is causing serious political and social problems with which the military has to deal.16 Attempts made under the structural adjustment of the 1990s to diversify the economy away from oil have essentially failed, an issue to which we will return later. (Table 5.2 provides oil statistics for the period 1980–1993.)
The boom in oil production during the 1970s was staggering. The revenue led to a very ambitious industrialization program, much of it import-intensive. Grandiose projects were undertaken and money was showered on neighboring countries for various projects of their own. Most symbolic of the poor planning was the Ajaokuta integrated steelworks in Kwara State, intended to make Nigeria self-sufficient in steel production. Under construction as of 1979, this plant is estimated to have cost $8 billion and was still not completed by early 1998. Few outside of government believe that the steelworks can operate economically, and some think that this is the reason the opening has been delayed. A railway to link Ajaokuta with the coast 100 miles away, and with supplies of imported ore, was planned but never built, leaving unsolved the considerable problem of how to import 700,000 tonnes of coking coal to the plant each year.

The growth of oil revenues combined with and reinforced a trend toward centralization of power by the federal government, which controlled these revenues. This centralized control was further strengthened by the creation of new states by military governments in 1967 and 1976 (and later in 1987, 1991, and 1996), thereby weakening and dividing possible alternative political loci of power. Revenue allocation continued to be a critical issue as the principle of derivation became more vocally pursued by oil-producing states and more vehemently resisted by nonproducing states, especially those in the north. For some, this issue became a litmus test of federal loyalty and provided the military with one justification to crack down on those who opposed the existing revenue allocation formula, notably (though not exclusively) the Ogoni.

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**TABLE 5.2 Oil Statistics: 1980–1993**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual Output (in millions of barrels)</th>
<th>Oil Exports (as % of total exports)</th>
<th>Revenue (in millions of naira)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>12,353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>8,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>7,814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7,253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>8,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>10,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>19,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>20,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>41,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>55,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>60,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>115,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>106,155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, much of the oil revenue was squandered, either in badly conceived projects or by the rapacious actions of successive administrations. Millionaire generals became very common during the 1970s (and, of course, later), as they took advantage of their positions to enrich themselves. Arthur Nwankwo, a noted social critic, has estimated that $176 billion in oil revenues remain unaccounted for during the 1980–1992 period. And the Okigbo Panel, established by the government, found that $12.4 billion in petroleum revenues were unaccounted for in the period 1988–1994. The "petro-naira" lifestyle was such that the country seemed able to achieve any goal it wanted. In international policy, it became courted by the major powers and received U.S. President Jimmy Carter on a state visit in 1977.

Much of the exploration and pumping of oil has been undertaken by European and U.S. multinationals, among which British Petroleum (BP) and Shell are the largest. Initially these multinationals had almost complete control of the market, but gradually the government introduced legislation to increase its stake. The Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC) was established in 1971 to protect the government's stake, which ranged from 33 to 55 percent of company interests. The Ministry of Petroleum merged with the NNOC in 1977 to form the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and soon the NNPC's stake in oil companies rose to 60 percent. Though couched in nationalist rhetoric, these government actions allowed members of the elite to gain entry to the lucrative industry. Real decisionmaking power rarely left the hands of expatriates. As Cliff Edogun sums up, "The engine of growth of Nigerian state capitalism in the oil industry is external, and the ruling class accentuates this growth pattern by formulating state policies that are supportive of foreign corporate capital." And Terisa Turner points out that the dynamics of these fluid relations between oil companies and the aspiring Nigerian business elite could have led to instability that triggered the 1975 coup.

Port Harcourt, the destination point of the eastern railway, has served for many years as the unofficial headquarters of the oil business, even though much oil comes from offshore, thus making it easier for oil companies to ship. In recent years these companies have come under increasing pressure from inside and outside the country for causing environmental degradation and doing little to improve the quality of life of those closest to the oil operations. Since 1993, the companies have been forced to stand by the Abacha administration during increasing repression in the country, setting themselves up to be accused of complicity.

The profit to be made in Nigeria is too sizable to ignore by the oil companies, which have increased their investment during the 1990s. Reserves are expected to last until at least 2020. These companies have certainly benefited from the government's (World Bank–influenced) economic liberalization policies. As Cyril Obi and Kayode Soremekun have concluded: "It is thus apparent that oil policy under the structural adjustment programme was one in which the Nigerian state deregulated its participation in the oil industry, leaving the private investors, especially
the Oil Majors, as the sole exploiters of the nation's most critical resource.  

At the height of the international outcry over the execution of the Ogoni Nine activists in November 1995, agreement was reached on a major investment package, worth $3.8 billion, to open up the LNG fields and begin exports from Bonny in 1999. Until now, the vast majority of the associated gas pumped from the oil fields has been flared, but a major development program led by Shell, along with Elf, Agip, and the NNPC (with a 49 percent stake), is looking to tap this lucrative export trade. Unfortunately, in 1997 Italy's state energy company pulled out of the LNG deal, preferring to take cheaper gas from Croatia. The Italians had been contracted to take half of the LNG supplies, so their departure left serious difficulties to overcome. Meanwhile, talk of sanctions has foundered owing to Western governments' inability to countenance oil sanctions, and the military government has been able to use the oil and gas potential to hold at bay Western pressures for democratization.

Recession and Structural Adjustment

The decline in oil revenues in the late 1970s and early 1980s was almost as dramatic as the boom of the early 1970s. During 1978 the country was earning $300,000 a day less in oil revenues compared with the previous year, due partly to declining production and the devaluation of the dollar. Two loans of $1 billion each were raised in 1978, an early sign of economic problems. At the beginning of the Shagari administration in October 1979, the debt-service ratio was a very low 1.5 percent, but by 1984 it had grown to 34 percent. Midway through Shagari's first term, global recession and oversupply on the world market caused oil revenues to drop substantially. Revenue from oil in 1981 was $17.5 billion, down from $25 billion in 1980—a situation that prompted the government to draw from reserves and, later, to negotiate loans.

The economy—seriously impacted because both the Obasanjo and Shagari governments had been lulled into a false sense of security and an overreliance on petroleum for budgetary expenditure—was essentially a victim of what E. Wayne Nafziger has called the "Nigerian disease." Little economic diversification had occurred or even been seen as necessary, and few trade inroads had been made into Africa. As Peter Olayiwola points out, "Leaders and planners thought that development could be transplanted throughout the Nigerian social and economic structures. The country discovered that instead of growth with balanced development, its growth was spectacular, uneven, and, finally, ephemeral." (See Table 5.3 for a list of selected economic indicators.)

The Shagari administration drew down its final IMF tranche in April 1982 but resisted growing international pressures to seek IMF assistance for fear of domestic political ramifications to IMF conditionalities. Furthermore, many within the northern elite wanted to maintain the traditional role of the state within the economy, a role that granted them some measure of control and patronage, rather
than peeling back state control and leaving themselves in more open competition with southern business elites. 31

Austerity packages were introduced in 1981 and 1982, development plans were cut back, projects were halted, and others were left underfunded. The import-led boom, which doubled the country's imports between 1980 and 1981, had been a way to maintain patronage through control of state industries and the granting of import licenses. However, many industries were unable to afford continuing imports and spare parts; foreign currency shortages strangled business and contributed to the increasing significance of the parallel market.

The rapidly declining economy (oil revenues fell to below $10 billion in 1983), poor fiscal management, gross corruption, and negligence contributed significantly to the widespread dissatisfaction with the Shagari administration and its eventual removal by the military in December 1983. The economic malaise helped galvanize the opposition of many business groups to the government and laid the groundwork for the military's coup. Both the Buhari and Babangida administrations were forced to face up to the unpleasant tasks of halting the country's economic collapse and leading a debate about the country's development policies—tasks never really undertaken at this level before.

According to Buhari, a former oil minister himself, the emphasis needed to be placed on domestic austerity and the possibilities of countertrade; but the government resisted liberalization on IMF terms, despite the continuance of negotiations started by Shagari with the IMF in April 1983. 32 The main stumbling blocks to an agreement were the devaluation of the naira, liberalization of trade and an end to licensing, and the removal of petroleum subsidies. Although the government agreed

---

**TABLE 5.3 Selected Economic Indicators: 1980–1993 (% change)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP</th>
<th>Manufacturing</th>
<th>Government Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>-8.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>-8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
<td>-23.6</td>
<td>-19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>-6.8</td>
<td>-11.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-3.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Reports, various years; International Monetary Fund, International Financial Statistics, various years.*
in principle that some devaluation was necessary, it wanted a steady, small devaluation as opposed to the IMF’s call for a quick 50–60 percent devaluation.

Buhari’s successor, Ibrahim Babangida, appeared to favor an agreement with the IMF, and there is some speculation that Buhari was overthrown in August 1985 because of his refusal to agree. Babangida appointed Kalu Kalu, a former World Bank employee, as finance minister, apparently giving a sign of his intention to come to an agreement. Babangida began something of a public-relations campaign by asking the people to debate the merits of an IMF deal. A military dictatorship is an unlikely advocate of a popular plebiscite, so it seems clear that Babangida wanted to use the debate for his own purposes. The government was perhaps taken aback by the vocal nationwide opposition to the idea of an IMF loan, with the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), academics, student groups, and many bankers opposed for a whole host of reasons. These included the fear that domestic firms would be unable to compete with foreign ones, that the devaluation of the naira would significantly raise the cost of imports, that transport costs would rise once fuel subsidies were reduced, and that Nigeria would be made more dependent by an agreement with the IMF. Those most in favor of such an agreement, not surprisingly, were corporate leaders.

Babangida decreed a State of Economic Emergency in October 1985, and yet he suspended talks with the IMF in mid-December in line with public opinion. The government continued to realize the necessity of reform and eventually instituted its own package in a structural adjustment program (SAP) initially launched in the budget speech at the end of December 1985 but given official credence in mid-1986. In light of the public’s opposition to the IMF, Babangida cleverly couched the tough SAP in terms of national self-sacrifice; but he continued negotiations with the World Bank, not only taking the lead in helping to draw the SAP together but also keeping the IMF as a background observer. The key breakthrough in negotiations occurred in July 1986 when the government agreed to the establishment of a Second-Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM), which in effect produced a devaluation of the naira (by the end of 1986 it had declined by 69 percent) and greater access to foreign exchange for Nigerian businesses. Efforts were still made to control the rate of devaluation, but it was not until March 1992 that the naira was “floated” for the first time.

This World Bank–supported program differed little from what the IMF had proposed: an openness to market forces, including a lowering of subsidies, the abolition of currency restrictions, the enactment of widespread privatization, the opening up of the market to foreign investment and ownership, and the devaluation of the naira. The implementation of the SAP gained IMF endorsement in November 1986, although an IMF loan was refused by Babangida, and this endorsement allowed the government to seek successfully limited debt rescheduling from the London and Paris Clubs in the following months.

Unfortunately, as the 1980s wore on, the country’s oil revenues continued to fall (in 1986 they totaled only one-quarter of those in 1980, and by 1989 earnings
TABLE 5.4 Nigerian Debt (in millions of dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Debt Service</th>
<th>Debt Service Ratio</th>
<th>Total Debt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>8,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>3,474</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>18,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2,178</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>31,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3,737</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>30,999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


had fallen to only $4.22 billion, with production just two-thirds the level of 1980), the debt situation worsened, and the deteriorating economy forced greater concessions to IMF demands. By 1990 the external debt had reached $32 billion, or 31 percent of forecasted exports for the year, well past the 1982 debt of $4.9 billion.\(^{36}\) *The Economist* bleakly projected that "it could take 50 years for Nigeria to regain the living standards it enjoyed at the peak of the oil boom,"\(^{37}\) although some evidence suggests that Nigerians' traditional cultural practices were not affected to quite the same degree.\(^{38}\) External debts continued to rise (see Table 5.4), reaching $37 billion in 1997.

The cutting of fuel subsidies proved to be a central rallying point for the opposition. The uneven impact of the SAP and the increased hardship among the poor, combined with slowed or virtually absent results from the reforms, caused immense political problems for the government to overcome.\(^{39}\) By the 1990s the economic outlook was poor, despite World Bank claims that Nigeria was "turning the corner," and the military was forced to prohibit discussion of structural adjustment during the transition to civilian rule. It was clear, however, that a section of the business elite had made fortunes, having been in a position to take advantage of liberalization, thus deepening societal inequality.

Industrialization had grown at an average of 10–13 percent a year during the late 1970s and 1980s, largely through import-substitution. The steelworks at Ajaokuta, already mentioned, was perhaps the most grandiose scheme, but fertilizer and plastics manufacturing as well as smaller steel mills were included in the comprehensive package. Vehicle assembly plants, such as Peugeot in Kaduna (established in 1975), Volkswagen in Lagos (1975), and Leyland in Ibadan (1979), were also highly visible and symbolic manifestations of apparent industrial growth.

Structural adjustment promoted increased local sourcing, but many industries saw utilization drop to 20–30 percent as raw material imports became harder to obtain. By the end of 1996, the Jos, Katsina, and Osogbo steel mills were estimated to be running at below 10 percent capacity.\(^{40}\) New cars became prohibitively expensive, and a lucrative trade in used cars developed. Key products such as barley (for the breweries) and flour were banned as imports (although the ban on flour was lifted in 1992 because of scarcity).

There was some export diversification, but the percentage of nonoil exports to total exports fell from 40 percent in 1970 to 12 percent in 1988, and down to only 5 percent by 1995 (see Table 5.5). Cocoa exports boomed and initially held out
hopes to lead diversification, but there was little long-term success. Much of this growth proved to be simply a mechanism for capital flight, as profits from cocoa exports could be held overseas in foreign exchange. Although producers could do well in the West African region on the unofficial market—especially in petroleum, since subsidies left a huge differential in prices with neighboring states—there was less growth than hoped in official trade. In any case, this attempt at diversification took place against a backdrop whereby Africa as a whole lost $50 billion in earnings between 1986 and 1990 as a result of declining commodity prices.

Many state-owned companies were privatized. And the limits to foreign participation in business, so carefully established in the previous decade, were removed except in critical areas such as banking and petroleum, where partnerships and partial privatizations were implemented. Opportunities for foreign investment increased significantly, but outside the lucrative petroleum sector there were few willing investors; this lack of investment was partially to blame for Nigeria’s slow economic progress, according to external agencies. Privatization led to a rise of unemployment, particularly among young, educated urban dwellers. As resentment to the SAP grew, especially among professionals and the middle class, the NLC’s ability to challenge government policy declined, owing to both decreased union membership and increased government repression.

The liberalization of foreign exchange markets led to a massive growth of banks, partly inspired by the quick, large gains to be made in the fluid financial market. Banks grew in number from 50 in 1986 to 120 in 1992. By the mid-1990s, more than half of these banks and 90 percent of the mortgage institutions had collapsed, resulting in further economic anguish. The instability within the political arena, especially after the annulment of Abiola’s victory and the transparent failure of the Babangida transition exercise, also deterred investors.

As part of the SAP, health facilities and funding were slashed, as were revenues for education and the universities. The World Bank reported in August 1997 that the physical structures of health facilities were in “total collapse.” Infrastructural funding was also reduced. In 1989, the World Bank began its Road Maintenance Initiative (RMI)
for Africa, focusing on efforts to maintain roads in good repair. In a May 1996 World Bank report, Nigeria’s urban infrastructure was described as “crumbling”; “[p]eriodic and routine maintenance, by far the most cost-effective infrastructure spending, is almost zero.”43 As Arthur Nwankwo puts it: “Nigeria defies all predictions of life expectancy of technological facilities.”44 The airline connections, once booming, also fell into disrepair as Nigeria Airways lost its domestic monopoly and its way, a situation not helped by gross incompetence, inefficiency, and corruption;45 meanwhile, competitor private airlines struggled to maintain profitable routes. By the mid-1990s, airline connections beyond the Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt routes were few and far between, with accidents increasing in frequency.

Since 1993, Abacha has added further uncertainty to the economic picture.46 Policy reversals have become a common feature of budgetary planning as the government has struggled to decide between implementing interventionist policies or allowing an open market, and between structural adjustment and privatization or state-inspired planning and control. The 1994 budget appeared to reverse freemarket principles and the SAP.47 In 1996, the government announced the Nigerian Investment Promotion Decree Number 16, which specifically aimed to promote foreign direct investment, foreign ownership, and the repatriation of profits abroad. There was also talk of privatizing the oil fields, conservatively valued at more than $40 billion.48 This idea was highly controversial, as one might expect, but it was supported by the IMF and the World Bank as a way of bringing efficiency to the sector. The means of implementing it remained uncertain, but early reports indicated that oil companies from Malaysia and South Africa were involved in some restructuring.49 Many Nigerians saw this situation as the ultimate payoff opportunity for a corrupt departing military.

In the 1997 budget, announced in January 1997, Abacha pulled back from privatization in general, brought the quasi-independent Central Bank back into the Ministry of Finance, and decided to maintain a dual-exchange rate mechanism for the naira. This last move allowed the government to buy dollars at one-quarter of the market rate, which had slumped to 80 naira to $1.50 By September 1997 it had fallen even further to 81.50 naira.51 Nitel, the communications company, was not to be privatized either. Such internal battles perhaps reflected the conflict between competing elites, some of which sought to maintain control of patronage through the state. The economic uncertainty that resulted, combined with volatility in the political arena, has led many nonoil investors to seek out other markets, leaving a question mark hanging over the future of the economy. Admittedly, the Nigerian Stock Market recorded a 145 percent growth rate in 1995 over the previous year; however, that was calculated on a very low base of $14.8 million in shares traded. But the stock market crashed after April 1997 and had not recovered by the end of the year.52 Overall, these policy fluctuations provided the World Bank and the IMF with a context in which to explain why the transition was so slow and painful.53

The benefits of the SAP continue to be debated both within and outside Nigeria.54 Although statistics can be conjured up to support both sides, as oc-
curred during the epic debate between the World Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in the early 1990s, the SAP debate is as much about ideology as development strategy. As we shall see in the next section, a true debate on "development" would not be a bad thing to have. However, in the current repressive environment, such a debate is impossible.

Issues of Nigerian "Development"

It is worthwhile to consider the overall direction of "development" since independence and the extent to which the purported goals have been met. But this is a very difficult and controversial topic with which to deal. One is forced to contemplate the aspirations of different civilian and military governments and the strategies implemented before and after the imposition of the SAP, as well as social-class perspectives and the radical alternative strategies proposed by many groups. This line of thought also presupposes that development has actually been planned, a conclusion given credence by the government publication of "development plans" but one to which some observers take exception. As Douglas Rimmer has argued with respect to the region, "At best, therefore, central plans in West Africa have been loose envelopes of ambitions and desires within which the economies have evolved; at worst they have been totally irrelevant to what actually happened."

Development Plans and Indigenization

Since independence there have been four development plans, and then structural adjustment after 1986. Whereas one could make the case that these development plans were of indigenous origin (albeit with external assistance), the SAP quite clearly has an external ideology and driving force. All four development plans proposed mixed development, combining strong government participation with private industry. They also hinged on foreign private investment, which accounted for 60–80 percent of all private investment and 30–40 percent of total investment before 1974. But the role of the government was critical in all of the plans up until the 1980s, reflecting important political and financial linkages between government and business elites.

Prior to independence, there were two main programs—namely, the 1946–1956 Development Plan and the 1955–1960 Economic Program. Much of this development planning, as in the later postindependence plans, was contingent upon neoclassical economic theory and the implementation of import substitution, a fairly standard economic strategy of developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s. The plans tended to focus on single-sector targets rather than a fully integrated program to boost the economy. The First National Development Plan (1962–1968) was drawn up largely by Dr. Wolfgang Stolper, an economist from the University of Michigan. Half of the funding was expected to come from for-
eign aid, although in the end only 25 percent was obtained. Transport was allo-
cated 21 percent of expenditure, the largest share; and agriculture, 13 percent. There was little or no talk of distribution of incomes, much to the frustration of many Nigerians.61

The Second National Development Plan (1970–1974), implemented immediately after the end of the civil war, was subtitled “Programme of Post-War Reconstruction and Development” and was boosted by rapidly growing oil rev-

The Second National Development Plan (1970–1974), implemented immediately after the end of the civil war, was subtitled “Programme of Post-War Reconstruction and Development” and was boosted by rapidly growing oil revenues.62 Many related projects were aimed at self-sustained growth and high per capita incomes. Greater indigenous control of industry and the economy was pursued, especially given the country’s experiences with foreign companies and governments during the civil war and the rapid expansion of a new wealthy elite grown rich from the war itself.

In this context the first Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree was signed into law by Gowon in February 1972. According to the terms of this law, some twenty-
two industries (Schedule One) came under complete Nigerian control (such as advertising, bottling, road transport), and other businesses (Schedule Two) re-
quired at least 40 percent Nigerian participation. Most observers agreed that the decree did not give the boost to national ownership that was anticipated, whereas some argued that it may have strengthened the hand of foreign business.63 Radical scholars have argued that national ownership was not the intention in any case, and that there has always been some question as to what exactly is meant by “indigenization.” The Nigerian elite wanted a greater financial stake in local busi-
ness, but it could not expect, and did not want, to displace foreign capital.64 The relative absence of trickle down has been noted by Basil Davidson, who argues that “[f]ree enterprises policies . . . could evidently work powerfully against any general progress.”65 Rampant corruption within the Gowon administration partly undermined the success of the plan, and, significantly, the largest allocation went to the maintenance of the bloated military and government apparatus.66

The Third National Development Plan (1975–1979), which originated under Murtala Muhammed, possessed a more dynamic edge in attempting to promote social justice, better distribution of income, and larger allocations to the agricul-
tural sector. The estimated expenditure of this plan was ten times greater than that of the previous plan, a sign of state liquidity thanks to oil revenues, but also an indication of its very ambitious goals. Funding was primarily from domestic sources; trade and industry received the lion’s share at 26 percent of the total, whereas education’s share at 7.5 percent and agriculture’s at 6.7 percent were well below respective allocations under the second plan.67

In recognition of the merely modest success of the 1972 Indigenization Decree and the fact that only a small group had benefited financially from the indigeniza-
tion exercise, Obasanjo signed another Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree in January 1977. This superseded the 1972 decree and contained three schedules. Schedule One covered forty activities reserved exclusively for Nigerians; Schedule Two required 60 percent Nigerian participation and covered fifty-seven types of
business; and Schedule Three called for 40 percent Nigerian participation in a range of thirty-eight business activities.

The Fourth National Development Plan (1981–1985) was probably the most ambitious one. Launched under the Shagari administration, it epitomized the vagaries of development planning. Its financial rationale was based on oil production at 3 million b/d (a total never attained) and correspondingly high oil revenues that became drastically reduced. In terms of the government’s priorities, transportation received the highest allocation, with 17.2 percent of total funds; education and agriculture received 10.7 percent and 7.9 percent, respectively. As a result of financial shortfalls and corruption, many projects were slowed or scrapped, and after the overthrow of the civilian government in December 1983 the plan was quietly forgotten.

All four development plans tended to follow a common economic strategy that emphasized the role of government intervention but sought to set loose the private sector. These plans failed to reach their ambitious goals, although certainly some limited gains were achieved. Abebayo Adedeji surveyed the first three plans and found common failings such as hasty preparation, a lack of grassroots input, an overemphasis on the public sector, and underimplementation.68 And as Olayiwola sums up:

Nigerian development plans failed to effectively address the structural problem of an inherited colonial economy dependent upon foreign markets for earnings and imported technology and food. Insofar as Nigerian leadership devised these plans, implemented them, witnessed their failures, and yet continued to plan according to the same principles, the crisis in which Nigeria finds herself appears to be at least in part the result of the leadership’s unwillingness or inability to recognize the serious flaws in the neoclassical paradigm.69

**Development Alternatives**

Attempts to change this overarching philosophy have generally failed, most visibly in attempts to include a radical perspective in the 1979 and 1998 constitutions and in the refusal of the Obasanjo, Babangida, and Abacha governments to register political parties that challenged the political economy status quo. Moreover, political, labor, and intellectual leaders who have pressed for change have had scant success, and many have ended up in jail.

The radical challenge, often espoused in socialist or social-class terms, developed during the colonial era and has consistently pointed to the deliberate failure of the political elite to spread the benefits of “development” to the majority. This “state robbery,”70 as Edwin Madunagu has called it, is exemplified by the vast and growing inequalities within society and by the conspicuous consumption of a fortunate elite. Most Nigerians struggle to eke out a living; even professionals usually have to find a second job or work some land to provide sufficient income and food for their families. Underemployment contributes to widespread street vend-
ing, and the parallel market and cross-border trade often offer the best prospect for a livelihood. Although virtually all governments have talked of economic re
form and self-reliance, opponents claim this to be simply jargon and an illusion.71

Okwudiba Nnoli, in a book that lays out a Marxist alternative strategy, sums up the challenge as follows:

Nigeria is involved in the second phase of its struggle for national liberation. The first phase ended with the achievement of political independence in 1960. Now . . .

Nigerians must tread the path to national development. In a historically short period of time they must emancipate the vast majority of their population from the perva-
sive and high incidence of poverty, ignorance, disease, squalor, poor diet, and poor

shelter. Life for the majority is intolerable.72

Statistical data, such as per capita incomes, point to a declining standard of living for the majority and little hope for change in the foreseeable future. (See Table 5.6 for a list of other human development indicators.) Alternative perspectives abound on the key role of Western capital. The mainstream government position is that Western investment is critical to economic success, a view strenuously sup-
ported by the World Bank and the IMF. An alternative perspective perceives this investment as doing little for the majority, and possibly even leading to greater national impoverishment by allowing foreign investors to connive with the Nigerian elite to draw money out of the country.73

Development alternatives in the 1990s are complex, although there appears to be fairly widespread agreement that the problems include agricultural decline, import
dependency for industry, poor infrastructure, a weak human resource base, and

high debt and inflation.74 For the sake of argument, the range of alternative reme-
dies can be somewhat simplified around two poles. At one pole, the position of the
government and business elite is to continue with a mixed capitalist strategy that has proved beneficial to these groups to date. Differences emerge over Nigeria's rel-
ationship with the IMF. Many see the Fund's policies as critical to the economic sta-
bility of the country, whereas some push for more nationalist, or even protectionist,
policies as a way to preserve their perceived economic benefits. Indigenization de-
crees promoted during the 1970s sought to provide an element of favored access by Nigerians to business control within the country. During the 1990s, however, most of
these policies have been withdrawn under the watchful eye of the World Bank—

again, opening up the prospects of foreign ownership of large sectors of the econ-
omy, much to the anguish of "nationalists," though not to their surprise.

At the other pole lie those who call for a break with the World Bank and struc-
tural adjustment, and who favor greater self-sufficiency and often a socialistic
strategy of development. Many who support this line are university academics and

labor unionists, but they have found government resistance to these argu-
ments to be fierce.75 Given the manner in which the Abacha transition is develop-
ing, the prospect that any dramatic change in development philosophy will occur anytime soon appears virtually impossible. Meanwhile, the life of the average
TABLE 5.6 Human Development Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people per physician</td>
<td>29,530</td>
<td>3,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy</td>
<td>42 years</td>
<td>52 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunization rate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal mortality per 1,000 births</td>
<td>15 births</td>
<td>15 births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality per 1,000 births</td>
<td>179 births</td>
<td>191 births</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: European Commission; The World Bank, World Development Report, various years.

Nigerian remains a desperate one: One child in five dies by the age of five, and only 38 percent of the population has access to safe drinking water.

Revenue Allocation

Within the context of the debate over development philosophies, other debates, often equally compelling, have occurred. One of the most intriguing has been the debate over revenue allocation, which is less a technical fiscal issue than a highly charged feature of Nigeria's political economy.\(^76\) The latter has become intense as state budgets have shrunk, as the states themselves have become smaller while multiplying in number, and as the percentage of revenue derived directly from the federal government has increased. During the First Republic, regional governments relied upon the federal government for about 55 percent of their revenue, but by 1980 this figure had risen to more than 80 percent. Most states today are nonviable and expensive. As all have state administrations and bureaucracies to maintain, federal resources are strained.

But the real debate concerns allocation principles, with population, derivation of income, and need all feeding into the equation. During the 1950s, derivation was a key element of allocation, a situation that allowed the West to take 38 percent of revenue allocated. And during the First Republic, population size was an important determinant of allocation, as the northern region gained most from this formula. However, since the 1970s there has been a greater emphasis on equal allocations, combined with a smaller measure of population input. During the Second Republic, because of intense political divisions between the federal government and opposition states, allocation became a contentious issue, with those states calling for smaller revenues to be kept by the federal center. After many months of wrangling, an agreement was reached in 1982 whereby 55 percent of revenues was retained by the federal government, 30.5 percent by the states, 10 percent by local governments, and the remainder kept for mineral-producing areas and environmental projects.

As for states' allocations, 40 percent of revenues was divided equally among the states, 40 percent was based on population, 15 percent on primary school enroll-
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ment, and the final 5 percent on internal revenue generated. These ratios have remained basically the same, except that the Babangida administration raised the level of funding to local-government areas to the detriment of the states and federal government. However, it should be remembered that, over the years, untold billions of dollars came into designated federal accounts from oil revenues—and these billions were not included in the funds for distribution.

Over the past several years there has been intense pressure from groups in the southeast to make derivation of income the key element of allocation, reflecting the importance of these groups in the oil sector. The federal government has refused most of these overtures, preferring to maintain the balanced formula that has predominated over the last twenty years or so; however, Abacha has raised the amount that states can retain from derivation from 3 to 13 percent, largely in response to Ogoni pressures.

The Environment

The environmental issues affecting Nigeria are diverse, as we might expect in so complex a country. Problems have emerged from the trend toward rapid urbanization and the resulting strain on infrastructure in major cities such as Lagos and Ibadan. Growing slums and rising numbers of unemployed and underemployed people, combined with the general challenges of survival in contemporary Nigeria, have turned these cities into human timebombs. Dense population in the south, particularly in the eastern states, has placed tremendous strains on arable land, food supplies, and living space. And in the northern regions, although frequent drought and the encroachment of the Sahara Desert have pushed the agenda on irrigation and reforestation programs, much remains to be done.

In recognition of these growing environmental problems, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) was established in 1988, but its effects have not been particularly dramatic. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for projects have not really been taken seriously in the past, and this situation appears unlikely to change much in the near future, although petroleum companies have been forced in recent years to cater more for the people affected by their operations.

One of the most pressing issues in the 1990s has been the pollution linked to oil and gas exploration in the southeast portion of Nigeria. This pollution has been brought to global attention by the Ogoni people's quest for better treatment both from the oil companies, particularly Shell, and from officials in the federal government who are held responsible for the degradation of the region. The Ogoni struggle, discussed in the previous chapter, stems from the environmental problems affecting their land, where oil spillage is common; but it has broadened into a general political struggle for greater economic benefits and increased autonomy from the federal government. Despite the fact that they contribute more to federal revenues than the inhabitants of any other equivalent area in the country, the Ogoni remain among the poorest of Nigeria's citizens.
The high-profile problems in Ogoniland as well as the repeated sabotage of its installations led Shell to withdraw temporarily from the region in 1993, after losses totaling $200 million. Embarrassed by revelations that it had armed (or attempted to arm) special police in the region, Shell was forced to fund a public-relations campaign to show the world how devoted it is to the Ogoni, even though evidence suggests otherwise. Companies such as Chevron and Mobil operate primarily off-shore, and so are not directly affected by these pressures.

In 1995 the World Bank published a preliminary report on the Niger Delta region in an attempt to delineate some common ground among residents, the government, and foreign companies. It is difficult to understand how the government can continue to turn a blind eye to the widespread, documented environmental damage in this region, but it does so.

Crime

Although crime is generally perceived as a "normal" societal issue, there are many who argue that the rapid rise in crime levels within Nigeria and involving Nigerians abroad is linked to the harsh impact of structural adjustment on the country as well as to the style of development adopted by successive governments. The simple problem of survival makes crime an attractive proposition for many; the weakness, and often connivance, of the police provides little deterrence. Furthermore, the prevalence of crime is considered to hamper the flow of foreign investment, particularly given the widespread publicity of the "Advance Fee Fraud" scam, also known as "419." In an effort to minimize that threat, the government in September 1997 placed newspaper advertisements in thirty-six countries, hoping also to spread the message of legitimate business possibilities in the country.

Although violent crime has persisted at epidemic levels for a long time, especially in the southern cities, the growth of the drug trade is perhaps the most significant problem internationally. Drug use has increased within Nigeria, but due to the growth of drug syndicates and couriers, Nigeria has become one of the most important countries involved in the international drug trade, ostensibly including members of the political and military elite. As Julius Ihonvbere points out, "Recently, the Nigerian bourgeoisie has found even more lucrative ways of accumulation requiring political influence and power and limited investments: currency trafficking, drug running, and importation of toxic waste." The sheer volume of drugs trans-shipped by Nigerians has brought Nigerian authorities into conflict with the United States, which has been highly critical of the Abuja government for not doing enough to combat this trade. The United States has also been unwilling to share the latest drug intervention technology with the Nigerian authorities for fear that this knowledge will fall into the hands of drug syndicates. Nigerian smugglers are known to be based in more than sixty countries, but they currently favor South Africa as a route for "swallowers." In fact, according to the U.S. government, an estimated 60,000 Nigerians have moved to
South Africa since 1993; many of these individuals have gravitated to the Little Lagos region of Johannesburg and are purportedly involved in the drug trade there.\textsuperscript{85}

**Vision 2010**

Overall, the development targets of the country remain controversial. Sani Abacha added to the controversy in September 1996 when he promoted his "Vision 2010" concept. Under Vision 2010, Abacha appointed a 170-member committee, headed by Ernest Shonekan, to consider the best-suited economic development program for the country to follow. The committee's job, according to Abacha, was to define "for our nation its correct bearing and realistic sense of direction."\textsuperscript{86} Many critics derided the whole affair, describing it as yet another diversionary tactic of a highly corrupt military government watching over the collapse of the country; they also wondered for whom, exactly, the "vision" was to be developed. But it is useful to accept Abacha's statement at face value as an admission that after nearly forty years of independence the development path of the country remained very unclear. The prospects that a socialistic or even truly self-reliant path to development will emerge from Vision 2010 are slim.

**Nigeria and the Emerging Global Economy**

The end of the Cold War has accelerated the globalizing trends within the world economy, drawing national and regional economies into greater integration with each other and offering new opportunities and challenges in the relations between states and multinational corporations. Indeed, "[g]lobalisation renders obsolete invented divisions of the world into developed and developing countries, industrialised and industrialising nations, and core and periphery," and provides "a new structure that envelopes both vertically integrated regional divisions of labour based on the distinctive comparative advantage of different locations, and horizontally diversified networks which extend their activities into neighbouring countries as part of corporate strategies of diversification and globalisation."\textsuperscript{87} A critical challenge for scholars has been to understand the dynamics of these changes in what has been termed the New International Division of Labor (NIDL) or the Global Division of Labor (GDL). A more focused challenge has been to assess how African economies fare in this trend of globalization, and whether there are opportunities available on which they can capitalize.\textsuperscript{88}

One common form of inquiry has been to compare the economic performance of the Asian miracle states with that of Africa to see whether any lessons can be learned.\textsuperscript{89} Such an exercise, though it has some benefits, should of course be treated with caution. Asian states have benefited from major foreign investment, from the unique political and strategic importance they attained during the Cold War, from development that occurred during a period of relative stability and
strength in the international economy, and from high levels of education, labor skills, and productivity that cannot easily or quickly be duplicated in Africa. Furthermore, the gap is widening between the integrated and dynamic markets of North America (and, increasingly, South America), Europe, and Asia, on the one hand, and those left on the margins, notably Africa, on the other—a gap that has markedly increased the latter’s difficulty in “catching up.”

Trade in manufactured goods is a critical element of the GDL: Manufactured goods as a percentage of total world exports amounted to 75 percent in 1990, but for Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) the figure was only 10 percent. According to the World Bank, the only region in the world that will become poorer by 2000 is Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the numbers of impoverished people will rise to 265 million, or 32 percent of the world’s total. Under the impressive title “Africa Can Compete in Europe,” the World Bank published a report in 1996 that talked ostensibly about Africa’s advantage in cheap clothing and handicrafts. But the terms of trade for Sub-Saharan Africa have been declining steadily throughout the 1990s, and debt servicing now takes over 80 percent of the continent’s foreign exchange earnings.

Official agencies portray Africa as the last great frontier for investment and development; in actuality, however, investment in Africa is at a low level, and disinvestment and capital flight are occurring at levels greater than those of any other region. During 1990–1995, of the $90 billion invested in developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa received only 2.4 percent; in 1995, Sub-Saharan Africa (again, excluding South Africa) received just $2.2 billion in investment, less than Chile, and much of that went into the mining sector. As Robin Broad and Christina Melhorn Landi put it, “Africa barely figures in these flows: the continent is simply not on the radar screen of most financial institutions and investors at the core of the new flows.” And as Thomas Callaghy sums up, “For most businesspeople from abroad Africa has become a sinkhole that swallows their money with little or no return.” This marginalization of Africa has led to speculation about the rise of a “global apartheid” economic system in which Africa is being relegated to separate and very unequal development.

It has been suggested that Africa’s advantages in the postindependence era are its resource potential, its low labor costs, and its industrialization potential, but in the new GDL these are not elements of advantage. Arguably, what is needed are skilled workers, efficient infrastructures, political stability (not necessarily democracy), good negotiation skills, strong telecommunications and other high-tech linkages, and the “desire” and “mindset” to break into the global market. In a recent OECD report, Jeffrey Fine summarizes the pivotal issues as follows: “The first is whether African governments possess the necessary credibility to manage their economies soundly, a basic condition for longer-term growth. The second is whether those exercising power are in fact committed to economic reform. The third and most essential issue is the integrity of national institutions, commencing with the nation-state itself.”
Trade reforms currently under way through the World Trade Organization and the completed Uruguay Round are thought to benefit most countries except those in Africa, which will suffer as preferential treatment for their exports is phased out. A recent study estimated that African countries could lose as much as $2.6 billion a year in trade because of the Uruguay Round and that their economies will actually have to increase in competitiveness just to stand still.101 Currency reform across Africa is also badly needed to harden what are often worthless currencies. As one commentator recently noted: "The only operative currency is the U.S. dollar. All [most African] currencies do is to give an illusion of money but actually get in the way of business."102

What can be added about the specific case of Nigeria? Although it is true that petroleum and gas exports continue to thrive, these sectors are not heavily labor intensive103 and, in that sense, have only a marginal impact on the economy. Furthermore, the simple provision of raw materials does not bring many advantages within today's global economy. This realization has led to some downstream manufacturing development in the oil and gas sectors, notably involving efforts to develop hydrocarbon industries. But Nigerian companies find it very difficult to compete in high-tech, information-based, service industries. Moreover, tertiary education has been on the slide, because of SAP financial exigencies but also because of the military's hostility to political opposition rallied on university campuses, and so a competitive and highly educated workforce has not been created to its fullest capacity.

Instability—or, perhaps more specifically, uncertainty—in the political and economic sectors has frightened away prospective foreign investors; and in any case there are safer and more dynamic markets in Europe and Asia in which to invest, and where larger returns are guaranteed. The telecommunications infrastructure in Nigeria also remains poor. According to the Ministry of Communications, the country needs another 500,000 telephone lines at an investment of $4 billion simply to meet the minimum criteria for users laid down by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).104 At the end of 1996 a fire in Lagos put tens of thousands of phones out of order for many months,105 and there were reports that the government was blocking the development of the Internet as a way to thwart the prodemocracy groups. The impact on business was perhaps not considered.106

Many nonoil investors now tend to look beyond Nigeria and its well-publicized problems of scams and corruption107 to South Africa, already more industrialized and more politically stable than Nigeria, and with greater potential for integration within the Southern African region than Nigeria currently possesses within the West African region. In addition, the Nigerian elite has grown accustomed to feeding from the trough of government and oil revenues, and incentives to change those habits are still not forthcoming.

Although the sanctions imposed by the European Union (EU) and the United States do not by themselves exclude investment (and, to date, have been mini-
mal), they constitute a nuisance factor and have become an element of deterrence for potential investors. The uncertainty of the return to civilian rule in October 1998, and the question of what a civilian government might do based on the track record of the Second Republic, also does not bode well for investment.

Yet Nigeria does conceivably have significant potential in a large domestic market, access via ECOWAS to the West African regional market, and a resourceful population, given some opportunities. The important point here is that efforts have to be made to revitalize West African regionalism (and regionalism elsewhere in the continent) to combat the potentially negative forces of globalization. As Jeffrey Herbst has pointed out, "Instead of abandoning a continent, Western countries and multilateral institutions will devote far more energy to picking winners in Africa." Many French companies in particular appear to be doing just that and are withstanding short-term disappointments and entrenching themselves for the long haul, although this stance may have something to do with established French interests across West Africa. But the odds appear to be stacked against the likelihood that the current elite will be able to conjure up an economic strategy conducive to diversifying and find a beneficial export niche for itself in the emerging global economy. The GDL entails complex pressures that provide the state an opportunity to push development, but also undermine and weaken the state, leaving it open to greater internal, ethnic pressures. The World Bank appears to have recognized that the state still has a purpose in African development, although the lessons from Asia should be very clear. Although it is probable that Nigeria will survive as an entity, there is always a possibility that it will be consumed by economic collapse and ethnic rivalries.

Conclusion: Uncertain Economic Future

Nigeria's economic performance has not matched its potential. From the standpoint of the 1970s, it is difficult to explain how the economy degenerated into its present condition. Nigeria now ranks 137th (out of 174) in the United Nations Human Development Index. The only possible consolation is that most of the countries worse off are also African. The large revenues from oil were—and are being—squandered, either in development projects that did not prove worthwhile or, sadly, in the obscene corruption of successive elites. Far from building an economy matching the "champion" of Africa, governments have helped relegate it to the status of "chump." Political instability, uncertainty, and bankruptcy plague the economy, in which the World Bank has increasingly become the key player. And in the current climate, agreements with the IMF seem to be very difficult to achieve. Agriculture still lags, as do manufacturing and industry; and petroleum, though still the lifeblood of the country, is open to many political pressures.

Of even greater significance is the manner in which the Abacha government is facing the immense challenges of marginalization within the global economy. Fluctuating policies and inept leadership do not inspire confidence either inside
or outside the country. The elite has certainly gained financially in structural adjustment as in other development programs, and there is little incentive for radical change. And another "new breed" of politicians does not inspire much confidence that meaningful change will occur.\(^{109}\)

One can hope that something called the "Nigerian spirit" or "character" will lift the country from the mire of pessimism. This prospect, however, looks unlikely in the near future, and after then it might be too late. The immediate focus of policy remains the outcome of the structural adjustment program and the question of whether it can give the economy sufficient strength to compete in the global economy. Until such issues are resolved, long-term confidence in Nigeria’s economic development must remain in the balance.

**Notes**

3. The railway to the north was originally built to export cotton, but groundnuts quickly became the primary export commodity from that region.


18. *New African*, February 1997, pp. 34–35. Nigeria’s own coal production peaked in the 1950s and, by the 1990s, was only one-sixth of peak level. Efforts to stimulate coal production brought only limited results.


26. *New African*, May 1997, p. 34. Spain, Turkey, and France are scheduled to take the other half of production.


34. Nafziger, *The Debt Crisis in Africa*, pp. 129–130. See also Yusufu Bala Usman, *Nigeria Against the IMF: The Home Market Strategy* (Kaduna: Vanguard, 1986), and Academic Staff

35. One of the most vocal supporters of the IMF loan was Chief Ernest Shonekan, managing director of the United Africa Company (UAC). Shonekan, who became “president” of the caretaker civilian government in 1993, helped assuage the fears of the West after the transition was aborted. He was later in charge of the Vision 2010, the committee created by Abacha in an attempt to find the true path for Nigerian development.


37. The Economist, 17 March 1990, p. 77. See also The Economist’s Special Survey on Nigeria, 21 August 1993.


45. In 1993, for example, a scandal involving the misappropriation of 2 billion naira swept the airline; see Newswatch, 10 May 1993, pp. 10–16.


55. For a good summary of the different stances taken in this debate, see Erik Thorbecke and Solomane Koné, “The Impact of Stabilisation and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SSAPs) on Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa,” in Jean-Claude Berthélemy (ed.), Whither African Economies? (Paris: OECD, 1995), pp. 17–56. Moreover, the World Bank in 1996 conceded that some mistakes had been made; in this connection, see “Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: Issues and Recommendations,” Findings, World Bank, Africa Region, 73, October


61. For a general discussion of the four development plans, see Olayiwola, Petroleum and Structural Change, pp. 95–135. See also Balabkins, Indigenization and Economic Development.


69. Olayiwola, Petroleum and Structural Change, p. 147.


85. New African, December 1996. “Swallowers” are individuals who swallow drugs in condoms or the fingers of surgical gloves as a way to transport small quantities of drugs. Given the depressed nature of the Nigerian economy, payment from carrying such small shipments far exceeds the wages from any work that might be found at home. See “Africa: International Crime,” Apic@igc.org, 26 January 1997.


89. See, for example, the comparison of Japan and Nigeria in B.A.T. Balewa, Governing Nigeria: History, Problems and Prospects (Lagos: Malthouse, 1994), pp. 170–177.


103. Labor costs in Nigeria are estimated to be only 3 percent of those in the United States.

104. *Africa Communications*, July–August 1996, pp. 47–50. Today, there are 600,000 phone lines in the country and an additional 15,000 cellular lines. Indeed, telecommunications is a major growth area within African economies. The ITU held major conferences in March and May 1996 in Abidjan to discuss these developments. See also Muhammad I. Ayish, “International Communication in the 1990s: Implications for the Third World,” *International Affairs*, 68(3), 1992, pp. 487–510.


Much of what we have covered in previous chapters has implications for Nigeria's relations within the wider international arena. Trade, debts, and the global economy are most obviously "international" in scope, but few issues in Nigerian politics can be said to be solely "domestic"—especially today, when the international community is watching the ongoing transition exercise very closely. In this chapter, then, we will focus specifically on Nigeria's foreign policy, including the mechanisms by which it is formulated.

One could make the case that Nigeria's role in the international arena is unypical of the majority of African states. For much of the postindependence era, two major factors—petroleum revenue and population size—have combined to produce the self-perception of an important, active player in international affairs, a country worthy of note by others, and one to which respect and status should be given. During the 1970s, coinciding with the oil bonanza, successive administrations built a diplomatic case for Nigeria to fulfill its own "manifest destiny" and be considered the "champion" of Africa,¹ a claim that many neighboring states were happy to accept along with financial assistance from Nigeria. (This assistance has often been referred to disparagingly as the "Father Christmas" approach to foreign policy.) The term champion, frequently used but rarely defined, implied that Nigeria was a country that the Western powers would listen to, and that could champion causes that other nations were too weak to—notably those of Africa, of the African diaspora, and of black culture.²

What stifled such claims in the late 1980s and 1990s were severe economic difficulties, the changing character of the post–Cold War arena,³ the detour from the political transition and subsequent Western sanctions and, after 1994, the rise of
an alternative and more respectable champion in South Africa. Even so, the country’s petroleum and gas potential continued to give the Abacha government some standing in the international arena or, alternatively, some residual strength that could allow it to ignore the international arena.

In this chapter we will examine Nigeria’s primary foreign relations since independence as a way of assessing the continuity and change that have occurred. As a basis for that examination, however, we need an overview of the general objectives of foreign relations since 1960, with explanations as to how and by whom those objectives have been formulated.

**Overview of Foreign Policy Objectives**

It is very difficult to talk with precision about any country’s foreign policy objectives because of the need to differentiate between rhetorical policies and those policies actually pursued. This is especially the case for many African states, which often lay out strident, activist policies but lack the resources to implement them. The policy of nonalignment provides a good example. Many states actively pronounce this to be their guide to foreign policy choices, and yet remain very closely aligned economically, politically, and sometimes even militarily to one or another group of states.

It is also difficult to judge and summarize the continuity of policy over a forty-year period and across different kinds of government (civilian and military, active and passive), in times of economic plenty and hardship. During the First Republic, regional governments had significant autonomy to promote their own economic policies, including direct links abroad—a complicated policy picture, given the multiple foreign policies. And as the economic resource base on which policy is based has varied considerably during the period in question, continuity needs to be considered as well.

Notwithstanding these problems, there are five fairly constant themes that constitute the backbone of Nigeria’s foreign policy and maintain a filter through which specific policies have been selected. These themes are the policy focus on West Africa, the country’s support for African liberation, its close financial and political relationship with the West, its cool attitude toward countries in the socialist bloc, and the strong role it has played in international organizations. As might be expected, these themes are marked by both complexity and contradiction, but a brief discussion may help to illuminate the broad parameters of policy.

Most scholars assume that Nigeria’s influence in the international arena grew during the 1970s and early 1980s, and that this influence is reflected in its policies. Others, although they admit to the existence of some superficial changes in policy, point to Nigeria’s continuing dependency on the West during this period of apparent “strength,” and identify many other factors in their explanation of the apparent “successes” of policy during this period. For example, Julius Ihonvbere argues that, in today’s conditions, “as long as the country is still underdeveloped,
dependent, politically unstable, highly indebted, and plagued with mismanage-
ment, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and deep ethnic, religious, and re-
gional cleavages, it cannot make a credible claim to continental leadership.” This
debate will be referred to in the discussions of policy that follow.

The first area of discussion concerns the policy focus on the West African re-
gion. It is to be expected that the policies of any developing state will focus on its
own geographical region, given economic and other constraints imposed on poli-
cymakers. Nigerian governments have at times looked beyond the region, con-
templating more grandiose arenas in which to operate, but they have eventually
been pulled back toward emphasizing policy in their own backyard. During the
First Republic, the Balewa government pursued a conservative regional policy
aimed at counterbalancing the radicalism and theater of its anglophone near-
neighbor Ghana and its leader, Kwame Nkrumah. And during the civil war, for-

gnernent policy became the means by which the federal government sought to isolate
Biafra from potential regional supporters—an effort that the Biafrans worked
hard to counter.

In the 1970s, the Gowon administration restored relations that had deterio-
rated during the war by pulling states into the Economic Community of West
African States (ECOWAS), an organization tacitly if not explicitly under Nigeria’s
leadership. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, policymakers cast their net be-
yond the West African region, but in more recent years policy has refocused on
this region. Abacha’s isolation from traditional European and American allies has
led him to seek solace in West Africa, where he has carefully courted neighboring
leaders. The success of this policy was demonstrated when he was elected chair of
ECOWAS in July 1996, at the height of the West’s campaign against the regime.

The second theme concerns Nigeria’s consistent support for liberation issues
within the continent. This policy was initially expressed through the country’s
support for decolonization, and in later years it focused on the struggle against
apartheid in South Africa. At times, government actions have been dramatic and
high-profile, as in 1975 with the Murtala government’s recognition of the MPLA
faction in Angola, or in 1979 with the Obasanjo government’s nationalization of
British Petroleum’s operations in Nigeria to leverage Zimbabwe’s independence
negotiations. Most of the time, however, policy has been less spectacular and ar-
guably less successful, coordinated through diplomatic channels in organizations
such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations, the Non-
Aligned Movement (NAM), and the Commonwealth. Nigeria’s moral and finan-
cial support for the Front-Line States (FLS) was consistent but arguably not as
critical as many Nigerians would maintain. Given the valuable role played in lib-
eration struggles, there was a bitter pill to swallow when Nelson Mandela turned
against the Abacha regime in 1995, following the execution of the Ogoni Nine,
and sought to ostracize the regime.

The third theme of foreign policy in this overview concerns Nigeria’s consist-
tently close relationship with Western states, flamboyant disputes and lovers’ tiffs
notwithstanding. Such ties encompass not only colonial legacies\(^1\) and political and social linkages, but also substantial economic and military ones.\(^2\) Relations with France over the past decade have greatly improved in contrast to the frosty 1960s, and links with the former colonial power, Britain, have remained fairly good throughout, largely owing to British petroleum interests. Accordingly, Nigeria has had strong relations with the European Union (EU) since the 1970s. Relations with the United States are harder to simplify: Blowing hot and cold at different times, they have nevertheless remained solid. And, as discussed in the previous chapter, relations with international financial institutions (IFIs), notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, cannot be characterized as warm or steady.

The fourth general theme of foreign policy concerns the relatively low profile given to relations with the socialist world. At independence, the colonial authorities did not bequeath to Nigeria any diplomatic relations with socialist countries, and the Balewa government did little to alter that circumstance. The civil war provided an opportunity for the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries to win favor by supplying arms to the federal government after the West hesitated to do so. But Gowon was quick to reconcile with the West, and socialist countries were soon relegated to the status of minor players. In the mid-1990s China came into prominence in terms of trade, oil, and weapons agreements. However, Nigeria's China policy appears to be one of convenience for Abacha, intended to ease the stress of the albeit lukewarm economic sanctions of the EU, the United States, and the Commonwealth.

The fifth and final theme to be mentioned here is Nigeria's strong role in international governmental organizations (IGOs). Although it is generally true that developing countries can exert more influence collectively within IGOs than outside them, Nigeria has sought to expand its own influence and status through these organizations. In the United Nations, Nigeria has had a role on the Security Council (and is jostling with South Africa in case Africa gets a permanent seat at some time in the future), was very active in the anti-apartheid actions of the UN, and has been a regular participant in UN (and associated) peacekeeping operations. Nigeria's role in other organizations such as the OAU, the Commonwealth, and ECOWAS point to the strong emphasis that successive governments have placed on IGOs.

### Foreign Policy Framework and Decisionmakers

Relatively less scholarly work has been undertaken on African foreign policies than on those of probably any other region of the world. There are at least three possible explanations for this: Western scholars tend to pay less attention to Africa than to other regions; the material needed for exhaustive study is simply not available in the generally secretive and suspicious world of African governments; and many African scholars (though not Nigerians, it must be added) have been
pressed by their own government to avoid digging too deeply into the affairs of state. In a nondemocratic environment, questioning of policy often takes on serious connotations. Consequently, it can be difficult to isolate with precision the frameworks for influencing foreign policy outcomes in African states.\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, this difficulty applies in the case of Nigeria; yet there have been more policy studies undertaken on Nigeria than on most other African states.

A primary influence on what decisions are made emanates from the head-of-state, and so the differing personalities and philosophies of Nigerian leaders can provide a basis for explaining the variation of policy over time. For example, the more dynamic foreign policy of the mid-1970s could quite accurately be attributed to the key role played by Murtala Muhammed, although he needed a strong economy to give backing to that policy. Along the same lines, "[c]onsonant with the legacy bequeathed it by the Balewa regime, Gowon's diplomatic style elevated a low profile into a virtue and low-keyed personalities into saints. . . . Conversely, the Muhammed/Obasanjo foreign policy on decolonization issues and apartheid South Africa was dynamic and active,"\textsuperscript{13} And in the mid-1990s, the lower profile and introspective orientation of the country's policies arguably reflected the personality traits of Abacha. Certainly in circumstances involving a military chain of command, the centralization of decisionmaking in the head-of-state is easy to understand and to exemplify.

However, such an emphasis on the "big-man" explanation oversimplifies policymaking procedures. External pressures, whether from dominant trade partners, such as Britain and France, or neighboring states and ECOWAS, or from the IMF and World Bank, create economic and political constraints within which policy has to be located. Domestically, there is an elite group around the head-of-state that can influence or even make policy. Few analysts of the Second Republic believe that Shehu Shagari dominated the foreign policy process, whereas many would maintain that a group of advisers, an inner cabinet, shaped the country's policies.

There is a myriad of pressure groups that also exert various degrees of influence over policy, depending upon the issue and the government. Groups such as the media,\textsuperscript{14} religious movements, intellectuals, students, and business elites are only some of those to be monitored.\textsuperscript{15} In the civilian republics, political parties have propounded different policy postures, and negotiation and bartering within the domestic political process must also influence policy outcomes. However, what Christopher Clapham has labeled the "privatization of foreign policy,"\textsuperscript{16} involving semi-autonomous policies by NGOs and civil society groups inside weakening states, has not really materialized under the stringent military control of Babangida and Abacha.

A significant bureaucratic structure also influences and shapes policy. The External Affairs Ministry is an obvious factor, given that its formal role is to gather information and formulate policy alternatives. This ministry has been well served by quality diplomats—although occasional charges of corrupt practices
have surfaced—and permanent secretaries have played important roles in drawing up policy as well as implementing it. As Olajide Aluko has observed, “In foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria the bureaucrats have played a more critical role than any other individual or organisation in the country since independence,” especially under military governments.18

Not surprisingly, the External Affairs Ministry has been through many reorganizations in the last forty years. Its growth matched the country’s global ambitions during the oil boom: Between 1965 and 1980 administrative class officers increased in number from 275 to 821, and the country’s overseas missions rose from 39 to 80. In 1981 the ministry was organized into four geographical departments—namely, Africa, America, Asia, and Europe—and an additional department handled IGOs. Five functional departments also existed, covering protocol, information and cultural services, consular and legal matters, international economic cooperation, and research. The Africa section was itself subdivided into three units examining IGOs in Africa, ECOWAS, and the OAU. In a further reorganization in 1988, the Africa department was divided into four units to look after (1) ECOWAS, (2) the OAU, (3) North Africa and the Horn, and (4) Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa. Finally, the department handling international economic issues was broken up into three units, focusing on multilateral issues, bilateral issues, and trade and investment.19

A quasi-governmental institute, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), has played a prominent role by discussing foreign policy issues in well-informed fora and providing a substantial publication program on policy issues. The Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) has also played a role by educating government personnel on relevant issues. Other government ministries, too, impinge on the foreign policy agenda, as trade, defense, agriculture, and education (among other areas) all have implications for external policy. And financial institutions are increasingly playing a role in policy formulation as the global economy places innovative strains on the Nigerian state. Again, the Central Bank is only the most obvious among the many institutions being drawn into the foreign policy game.

Of course, an important consideration is not just how policy is made but in whose interests it is made. The complex dynamics of political, military, and business elite interests, along with competition within and between these elites, constitute a further mosaic of forces with which we must grapple in understanding policy.

Policy in West Africa

West Africa is the region in which Nigeria can exert the most influence economically and diplomatically, and in which its major security concerns are located. Consistently since independence, governments have sought to maintain a strong presence within this region. During the First Republic, policy could arguably be described as defensive, with the highest priority given to protecting the country...
from the perceived disadvantage of having nothing but francophone neighbors—all apparently under the malevolent influence of Paris. A potential anglophone alliance with Ghana proved politically impossible because of the stark differences in political style and policies between a conservative, Islamic-led Nigerian republic and the radical, charismatic socialist government led by Kwame Nkrumah. However, a successful ethnic disentanglement with Cameroon did occur, following a UN plebiscite in the region in 1961.

The civil war intensified the sense of isolation and suspicion of neighbors as the breakaway Biafran region gained physical and moral support from most of the neighboring francophone states, as well as from France. In an attempt to protect the country from further isolation, especially in light of the burgeoning economic strength derived from petroleum, Gowon sought better dialogue and trade with his West African neighbors after the end of the civil war. After several years of effort and much financial largesse, talks culminated in May 1975 in the formation of the sixteen-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In terms of population size and wealth, Nigeria is roughly equivalent to all the other ECOWAS members combined; thus it needs to be wary of its role within the organization.

The successful formation of ECOWAS, constructively assisted by Togo’s President Eyadema, was a significant milestone for Nigerian diplomacy. Indeed, ECOWAS was the first African organization to transcend traditional divisions of anglophone, francophone, and lusophone countries—although it was somewhat undermined, if only temporarily, by the continuing existence of a francophone-only subgroup, the Communauté Économique de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (CEAO). The CEAO—formed in 1973 ostensibly to rival or at least provide good bargaining leverage with an embryonic ECOWAS—linked states together through use of the CFA franc. Mutual rivalries and suspicions, primarily though not exclusively with former President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d’Ivoire, limited the options of ECOWAS, as did the massive illegal expulsions of several million ECOWAS citizens from Nigeria after the economic downturn. (These expulsions occurred in 1983 and 1985, and the majority of citizens involved were Ghanaian.)

Many of the objectives of ECOWAS have not come to fruition, notably including the customs union and the common market. Even the free movement of people is consistently constrained, and there is little movement of capital within West Africa. Official trade within the region actually fell during the 1980s but remains at about 5 percent of total trade (although unofficial trade continues to boom), and efforts to promote integrated regional development programs have foundered on national resistance.

Efforts to keep the peace in the Liberian civil war led to the formation in May 1990 of an ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) peacekeeping force, led and largely staffed and funded by Nigeria and supported diplomatically by the United States. However, at best, ECOMOG has been only moderately successful, reflecting the difficulty of regional peacekeeping operations in a changing African land-
scape. Nigeria had an overt mission of maintaining stability in the region and seeking to expand its “hegemonic influence.” As Emeka Nwokedi effectively puts it, was this a case of “Pax Nigeriana” or “Pax West Africana”?

However, Nigeria’s role in Liberia appeared to be far from impartial. The Babangida administration seemed to oppose possible democratic tendencies in the country, and Babangida was a strong supporter (and apparently business partner) of Liberian President Samuel Doe. Rumors of major drug trafficking operations involving Nigerians in Liberia were also rife. The strains of keeping the political support for ECOMOG across the region highlighted very significant political divisions within ECOWAS, as the francophone countries supported the faction of Charles Taylor. This was especially the case for Houphouet-Boigny, who had some scores to settle with the Doe regime.

The failure of the Abuja Peace Accord, signed in August 1995, weakened ECOMOG’s efforts considerably, and domestic opposition within Nigeria challenged the resolve of the government to maintain an extensive commitment. This domestic opposition focused on the Nigerian death toll in the conflict, estimated at more than 1,000 troops (one-fifth of the Nigerian contingent), though always denied by the government. The government did finally admit in 1996 that it had spent some $3 billion on the war effort, and that hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars from the Gulf War oil bonanza had been diverted into the conflict.

Events in 1997 underlined the government’s resolve to stamp its mark on the region, as elections in Liberia in July were organized and partly funded by Nigeria. A military coup in Sierra Leone in May 1997 also galvanized Nigeria into action, and military force to dislodge the “rebel” government, endorsed by both the UN and the OAU, was undertaken in early June and continued into January 1998. The irony of a repressive military dictatorship spreading democracy around West Africa was not lost on observers. However, a plausible explanation was that Abacha was attempting to strengthen his own credentials in support of democracy, ready for a run at the Nigerian presidency in the elections of 1998. In addition, his actions won him grudging support from Western countries, who themselves were unwilling to become directly involved.

Since 1975, Nigeria’s influence across the region has come more through direct financial assistance to build various projects in neighboring states than through trade. However, this ad hoc, case-by-case foreign assistance has not guaranteed long-term influence; indeed, as the Nigerian economy has ebbed over the last decade, so have options for this type of largesse. Pressures from the IMF have tended to be for structural adjustment on a national rather than regional basis, and so there has been little incentive or opportunity to coordinate policies within the region. Moreover, poor infrastructure continues to hamper the expansion of communications and trade across the region, although unofficial trade and smuggling are flourishing. Of course, such “illegal” trade thrives specifically because borders are present, and so there is little incentive for various business and political elites to eradicate them. However, building on this unofficial trade could offer some hope of growth for the official organization.
Nigeria's relations with its neighbors have generally been positive, but at times they have turned violent. Border clashes with Cameroon over oil-rich disputed territory have occurred sporadically over the last two decades, but they flared into violence in 1991 and 1994. Then, in 1995, the dispute went before the International Court of Justice, which ruled that insufficient evidence for Cameroon's claim had been presented, and so the conflict continued to simmer.

Lower-level skirmishes have taken place on the Niger and Benin borders. The Chad situation, especially in light of the Libyan role in the 1980s, brought a Nigerian military and diplomatic presence to that border region. It also helped to bring Nigeria and France closer together over a common enemy in the person of Muammar Gaddafi.

There is little or no evidence to suggest that military regimes have been more pro-ECOWAS than the civilian regime of the Second Republic. Military leaders have attempted to remain on good terms with other military leaders in the region, but personality clashes have made such relationships more of a random occurrence. It is assumed that civilian governments are less susceptible to personality conflicts, and so might help ECOWAS advance, but this assumption remains speculative. The failure of democratization in Nigeria to date has had little impact on ECOWAS relationships as democratic developments in the region are still very uneven. Neighboring states are understandably wary about throwing the first stone at their large neighbor and have successfully resisted diplomatic overtures from Europe to isolate the Abacha regime, as have most other African states.

The future role of Nigeria in West Africa remains unclear, as it depends on the domestic transition, on the outcome of changes in other countries (including those proceeding from ECOMOG operations), and on developments within the EU that would potentially weaken the francophone group's links with France. Clear evidence of these changing relations came with the devaluation of the CFA franc in January 1994, an event that potentially strengthened Nigeria's influence in the region.31

Ali Mazrui has speculated that Nigeria will continue to expand its hegemonic role in the region, and that this outcome will include the future incorporation of Benin, Niger, and parts of Cameroon. What is certain is that ECOWAS needs Nigeria's committed support, especially of the financial kind, given the organization's perpetual bankruptcy; and that the Abuja government continues to covet its central role, not least in terms of hosting the ECOWAS headquarters. Nigeria's strong role in ECOMOG indicates the relative influence it continues to possess within the region. But it is unlikely that substantial breakthroughs will be made in ECOWAS relations at any time in the near future.

**Diplomacy in Africa and the OAU**

As a founding member of the Organization of African Unity in May 1963, Nigeria was somewhat influential in shaping the conservative character of the organization's charter. The Balewa government had little interest in creating something
akin to a continental government as espoused by Nkrumah and his allies, and so it opted for an IGO with sovereignty entrenched. Successive governments have worked with and through the OAU, and especially its Liberation Committee, which Nigeria came to dominate in the 1970s through its financial contributions and its self-perception as a "distant front-line state." But a realistic assessment of the limitations of the OAU has prompted Nigeria to pursue alternative bilateral channels for policy also.  

The 1979 Constitution contained only one section on foreign policy, but it made the country’s priorities clear: “The State shall promote African Unity, as well as total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa and all other forms of international cooperation conducive to the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect and friendship among all peoples and states, and shall combat racial discrimination in all its manifestations.”

In November 1975, Murtala Muhammed’s decision to ignore the wishes of his foreign service advisers and recognize the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola galvanized the OAU and helped to break the organization’s deadlock. Nigeria followed up with a $20 million gift to Angola and a credit line of $100 million. Nigeria provided substantial assistance, financial ($5 million a year during the early 1980s) and otherwise, to the OAU Liberation Committee and, then, to the FLS; it also strongly supported the presence of Cuban troops in Southern Africa to counter Western influence there. Nigerian planes were used to fly supplies to nationalist forces in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Direct efforts to boost the credibility of the OAU in Southern Africa against apartheid South Africa were made by successive governments, though with marginal success. Shehu Shagari was perhaps not as dynamic as some would have liked. As Ibrahim Gambari, Buhari’s external affairs minister, was to say of the Second Republic, “Nigeria appeared to be a demographic and economic giant on the continent, but a political and diplomatic dwarf in African affairs.”

It was in this context that talk of developing a nuclear capability was heard, both as a means of proving Nigeria’s importance and status and as a mechanism to press for change in Southern Africa. The FLS were themselves not particularly supportive of a nuclear Nigeria, as such a stance might have brought those states into a nuclear arena. Exactly how Nigeria would use a nuclear weapon inside South Africa remained unclear, given the predicted high casualty rate among Africans themselves. And there were major doubts that sufficient technology would be available to build a nuclear capability in a country that found it difficult to maintain an adequate power and water supply. In short, the question as to what use there would be for a nuclear capability remains unanswered in this postapartheid era. For that matter, there is little official discussion of the topic in Nigeria, although pockets of support do exist.

Much of Nigeria’s Africa policy has been conducted outside the OAU in bilateral channels. The country’s efforts to influence apartheid South Africa were taken through direct assistance to the FLS and in diplomatic negotiations with Western powers. Quite serious talk occurred during the late 1970s about Nigeria’s
use of its “oil weapon” to force Western states to compromise over South Africa, but such use was unlikely to occur even at the height of petroleum revenues.

On some issues beyond West or Southern Africa, governments chose to play a low profile as there was little to gain or lose from intervention. However, Nigeria's status as “Africa’s leader” required an activist and interventionist stance on many other issues, such as Western Sahara. As Ihonvbere states, “The West courted it [Nigeria], liberation movements relied on its diplomatic and financial support, African countries counted on it for financial assistance, and international organizations touted it as the most credible and solvent country in Africa.” Examples of Nigeria’s status include its hosting of special sessions of the OAU in 1980 and 1991 to discuss the continent’s economic problems, leading to the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Abuja Declaration for an African Economic Community (AEC), respectively.

But some scholars have identified continuing weakness and dependence within the political economy that undermined Nigeria’s diplomatic capability, even at the apparent height of its influence. The oil weapon was bandied about, but never used against the West. Nigeria simply could not afford to cut oil supplies to the United States or Europe, for fear of causing immense economic damage to itself. Gowon chose not to politicize the country’s involvement in OPEC after 1973, focusing on higher revenues rather than political goals, although he did agree to cut relations with Israel under pressure from Muslim groups. It is true that Nigeria gave large amounts of financial assistance to many countries and liberation movements in Africa, but it is questionable whether it gained anything concrete from its foreign policy. During the Second Republic, numerous factions and alternative foci of decisionmaking made foreign policy less coherent than it might have been. Aluko partly blamed Shagari for this situation, saying that if the president “could come to grips with foreign policy and provide effective direction, leading the foreign service from the front rather than from behind, he could have considerable impact on the decision-making process.”

In 1986 Babangida’s external affairs minister, Bolaji Akinyemi, attempted to add greater realism to expectations with a policy of “reciprocal consultation,” under which states had to consult with Nigeria before embarking on policy in order to be eligible for assistance. A year later, however, the government introduced the Technical Aid Corps (TAC), which was to provide technical assistance to any Lomé Convention member-state that requested it. Another issue is whether Nigerian aid was truly critical to the outcome of any diplomatic situation. We have already seen that Nigeria’s role in Chad was not critical in changing the situation there. As for the breakthrough in Angola, it is unlikely that the United States would have intervened, especially as it had a willing proxy in South Africa ready to destabilize the government. And in the talks over Zimbabwean independence, Nigerian pressure in withdrawing some sterling reserves, hampering bids by British companies, and nationalizing British Petroleum proved helpful but certainly not decisive, and in any case Western powers were already committed to the path toward independence.
Another aspect of diplomacy emerged in the field of sport, particularly during the African boycott of the 1976 Olympic Games and, two years later, the boycott of the 1978 Commonwealth Games by Nigeria alone. Both these boycotts were intended to protest broadly against apartheid and the political situation in Rhodesia, but specifically against New Zealand's sports links with South Africa. Nigeria's role was a prominent one, not just because of its diplomacy but also because of Nigerian leadership of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa (SCSA). Preparations for the 1976 boycott were somewhat disjointed, and Nigeria initially appeared opposed to them. However, once the boycott was called the country took a prominent role, and the boycott helped to solidify the continent in the wake of the raid on Entebbe by Israeli forces and the Soweto uprising, both of which occurred in the few weeks prior to the Olympics. Interestingly, only Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire ignored the boycott, partly in response to Nigeria's leadership, and perhaps also because the games were held in Montreal.44

Nigeria's boycott of the 1978 Commonwealth Games, ostensibly for the same political reasons, occurred under more confusing circumstances. The boycott call was issued just one week before the Games, and no other country supported it. A month earlier Nigeria had sent a large delegation to the All-Africa Games in Algiers, and there was much speculation that the sports budget had been used up. This was unlikely, however, given the wealth of the country at the time. An alternative explanation—that Nigerian athletes were not expected to do very well at the Games—dented the image of Nigeria as Africa's "champion." Ultimately, it was more likely that Nigerian leaders wanted to send a message of disapproval to the Commonwealth, which was heavily involved in the Rhodesian negotiations, and that the government was happy to remain alone so that it could be seen as carrying the mantle of African leadership by itself.45

The true level of Nigeria's influence during the 1970s46 and early 1980s continues to be debated, but the demise of this influence from the mid-1980s onward is beyond doubt. One early example of this outcome was Nigeria's attempt in 1987 to develop its own IGO, the Concert of Medium Powers, to which "medium powers" were to be invited. After its first meeting, the group fizzled out as Nigerian funding was not forthcoming. The demise of Nigeria's influence points to the conclusion that, at best, the country's "power" was transitory, and that an insufficiently stable economic and political base has weakened and undermined its role today. It also alludes to the fact that Nigeria looked impressive partly because the rest of Africa was so weak and poor. But taking this argument a step further, we should note that policy has shifted over the past decade or so to focus more intensely on Nigeria's effort to create economic development for itself. As Joe Garba, a former external affairs minister, astutely pointed out a decade ago, "The problems of economic development and the provision of a better standard of living for our people will become the preoccupation of foreign policy."47

The OAU itself has been eclipsed in importance since the mid-1980s by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), which carried the
fight to the IMF in opposition to structural adjustment. Throughout the 1980s a prominent Nigerian economist, Adebayo Adedeji, directed the UNECA (again, an indication of Nigerian status); but, ironically, Nigerian governments were opposed to many of the arguments proposed by the UNECA and instead favored IMF/World Bank positions. Money is still found to pursue government interests (e.g., in Liberia and Sierra Leone), but there is less to go around. Nigeria cannot match France or the United States in foreign aid or technology assistance. Meanwhile, bitter rivalry with South Africa, particularly over the pace of democratization and human rights abuses in Nigeria, seems bound to lead to continuing friction between the two countries. On one thing the two countries are agreed: They both want to lead Africa. That should provide grounds for tension in the foreseeable future.

**Europe: Evolving and Redefined Relations**

Nigerian policy contains something of a paradox that most African states share: The espoused focus is on Africa, but the policies carrying the most importance have often pertained to Europe. An explanation for this paradox points to the colonial legacy that left Britain with a crucial role in trade and financial relations with Nigeria. Britain still retained an aura of mystique for many in the elite and was the favorite point of call for those going abroad. In 1961, the government turned to Britain for its defense by signing the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, which allowed British troops to train in Nigeria. Nigeria unwillingly abrogated this pact in January 1962, following student pressure and intense opposition from Awolowo’s Action Group (AG).

During the 1970s, Britain’s increasing yet somewhat reluctant involvement in the European Union (or Community, as it was known then) coalesced with the historical interest of many European states in West Africa and led to a strengthening of ties between Nigeria and other EU members, even though its main foreign investors and trading partners have always been European (see Table 6.1). Preferential trade agreements with Britain were renegotiated as arrangements with the EU, and Nigeria was a key negotiator and player in the signing of the Lomé Convention in 1975 and subsequent renewals.

In Nigeria, as in many African states, it was natural immediately after independ- ence that strong residual ties would exist with its former colonizer; indeed, the Balewa government did little to alter its important economic linkages with Britain and refused to break off relations after the Rhodesian unilateral declaration of independence in 1965. Trade and investment remained at high levels, especially in the growing petroleum sector, but the civil war unsettled the relationship somewhat. The British government was constrained by domestic public opinion in a period when people were being bombarded with images of starving Biafran children. Its desire to maintain access to Nigeria’s oil eventually overcame those pressures, and in 1968 the British acted strongly to support the federal government;
TABLE 6.1 Nigeria’s Principal Trade Partners: 1991 (in millions of dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imports cif(^a)</th>
<th>Exports fob(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium-Luxembourg</td>
<td>158,858</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>177,761</td>
<td>125,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
<td>151,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China, PRC</td>
<td>189,117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td></td>
<td>298,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>437,306</td>
<td>307,135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>874,733</td>
<td>414,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td></td>
<td>190,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>125,827</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>84,401</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>295,823</td>
<td>431,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>398,362</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>80,155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>297,263</td>
<td>475,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td></td>
<td>135,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>58,904</td>
<td>1,112,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>141,315</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>746,175</td>
<td>148,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>559,733</td>
<td>3,497,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (including others)</td>
<td>5,399,004</td>
<td>7,727,370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Cost, insurance, and freight.
\(^b\)Free on board.


British companies benefited from this support in the postwar reconstruction of the 1970s.51

In 1979, the new British government under Margaret Thatcher was upset by Nigeria’s high-profile diplomacy over Zimbabwean independence and by the nationalization of British Petroleum’s operations in the country, but these tensions were not enough to prevent Shehu Shagari from paying a successful state visit to Britain in March 1981.52 Nor did the end of civilian rule damage relations all that much, although the “Dikko affair” in mid-1984 caused significant strain. Three Israelis and one Nigerian were caught attempting to smuggle Alhaji Umaru Dikko, Shagari’s minister of transport, back to Nigeria in a crate from his London exile. The British government accused the Nigerian government of complicity, for which there was considerable evidence; but a huge diplomatic row ensued. External Affairs Minister Ibrahim Gambari played tough, arguing that “[w]e need not deal with Britain from a position of subservience. Britain would always try to maintain its commercial, capital and political interests in Nigeria.”53 Such a rationale remains valid today.

Babangida and Thatcher overcame their mutual hostility, especially over South Africa, forming a good working relationship that included Thatcher’s visits to
Nigeria in 1988 and 1989. However, the Thatcher administration made it clear that relations with African states—including Nigeria though excluding South Africa—were relegated to a level substantially subordinate to those with Europe and North America. By the early 1990s, British aid policy had taken on the character of “benign neglect” and began to contain elements of conditionality based on democratization, although the latter was selectively and sparingly instituted. It is probably fair to conclude that Nigeria’s economic and diplomatic relations with Britain have not suffered too much throughout the Abacha era. Britain remains the principal source of Nigeria’s imports, although it ranks only seventh in terms of exports, largely owing to its lack of need for Nigerian oil. In addition, Britain maintains an official position of opposition to some policies of the Abacha regime and pressures for civilian rule, but this role is low key and does not damage Britain’s extensive financial involvement, especially in the oil and gas sectors, and in the sales of weapons to the regime. “Constructive engagement,” if I may borrow that phrase with its several connotations, perhaps best sums up British relations with the Abacha government; in many respects it represents a strategy similar to the one that Britain maintains with the Daniel arap Moi government in Kenya in the late 1990s. Quiet diplomacy and behind-the-scenes pressure tend to lead a country to turn a blind eye to its political problems and become interested simply in business. This appears to have been the strong message emanating from the Nigeria-Britain Chamber of Commerce conference that took place in early 1997. A new Labour government, elected to office in May 1997, promised a tougher line on Nigeria and the promotion of human rights there, and moved to maintain Nigeria’s suspension from the Commonwealth. However, its tough line did not extend to oil sanctions.

Today, France is Nigeria’s largest trading partner in Europe, and relations between the two countries are cordial. During the 1960s, however, Nigeria was highly suspicious of French motivations in the region. The break in diplomatic relations following France’s three nuclear tests in Algeria in 1960 lasted from January 1961 until October 1965, and after 1967 relations further suffered through France’s tacit though not quite diplomatic support for Biafra. De Gaulle saw the possibility of the breakup of Nigeria, which probably would have been in French interests at this time.

France had also perceived Nigeria to be its key competitor for trade and influence across West Africa, where France’s primary African interests lay in the 1960s and 1970s, and so antagonism was a natural by-product. The development of ECOWAS was considered to be Nigeria’s attempt to displace France from the region. However, the growth of ECOWAS and the trade possibilities of that market alongside Nigeria provided opportunities for French business that were gradually picked up, most notably with the establishment of Peugeot in Kaduna in 1973. However, some argue that this French economic penetration was a mechanism to gain greater control over Nigeria.

Official relations warmed as France and Nigeria found a common enemy in Muammar Gaddafi and common interests to protect in Chad during the civil war
there at the end of the 1970s. Nigeria played a major role in diplomatic efforts to bring peace to Chad, hosting three peace conferences in 1979 alone.\(^{61}\) and then played a constructive role in OAU-mediated peacekeeping efforts, sending troops into Chad. Initially, the Shagari government was hostile to the presence of French troops in southern Chad; but as Libyan intransigence increased, French troops were seen as vital to blocking the southward expansion of Libyan interests.\(^{62}\) This Franco-Nigerian rapprochement was assisted by France's strong commercial interest in Nigeria—evident in joint partnership companies such as Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO), Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain (SCOA), United Bank of Africa (UBA), and Dumez—and the unlikely friendship was sealed with Babangida's state visit to France in the late 1980s.\(^{63}\)

The devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994, though directly affecting the francophone zone, also helped French-Nigerian relations. It was an indication of the emphasis placed on commercial relations by France rather than of the emotive linkages to *la francophonie*. And it will most likely weaken the barriers between Nigeria and francophone West Africa, thereby possibly assisting the development of ECOWAS and French trade. The growing public debate within France for a diminishing imperial role in Africa in return for a more balanced economic role also helps Nigeria.\(^{64}\)

Nigeria's relations with Germany and other European countries have never been substantial, nor have they suffered the mood swings that have characterized the British and French relationships. German interests increased substantially during the 1970s and early 1980s, led by construction companies such as Julius Berger, which still ranks as the country's twelfth largest company. Germany is the third biggest consumer in the EU of Nigerian petroleum (after France and Spain), and third in overall trade. But the recession in Nigeria, combined with German unification and the opening of Central Europe, has led to declining German investments in the country. By 1992, investments in Africa were only 1.4 percent of total German investments, and half of that figure was attributable to South Africa.\(^{65}\)

The relationship with the EU did not become a primary concern until after the British accession in 1973. During the 1960s governments were suspicious of the EU both because of its antagonism toward Britain and because of the possible undermining of nonalignment that closer ties might have brought. This situation left Nigeria with difficult trade options and forced the Gowon government to negotiate for favorable access to EU markets; in turn, these negotiations led to the wider development of access rights for most African states. Nigeria's oil has free access to Europe, and the country has not been eligible for export stabilization funds for commodity earnings protection; however, it has benefited from Lomé funds invested for development. Under Lomé IV, signed in 1990, Nigeria has been the largest recipient of EU funds, although funding from the European Investment Bank (EIB) has been frozen since June 1993 for nonpayment of arrears.\(^{66}\)

The EU remains centrally important to Nigerian trade, accounting for 39 percent of total trade in 1994.\(^{67}\) Companies from EU countries produce on average
62 percent of the country's petroleum, and EU countries consume 35 percent of total production. In terms of EU-ACP trade, one-fifth of ACP exports to the EU are of Nigerian derivation (again, primarily oil), and one-fifth of imports go to Nigeria. However, it is estimated that between 1993 and 1996 almost 10 billion naira were divested by European companies from Nigeria, although this figure has been masked somewhat by continuing investment in the oil and gas sectors.

Following Abacha's coup in 1993, the EU has been a key player, imposing mild sanctions against the regime and then extending them following the execution of the Ogoni Nine in November 1995. These sanctions included a freeze of 220 million ECU in aid, a refusal of visas to members of the military government (although this refusal has been reversed on several occasions), and a freeze on military sales; excluded, however, were contracts signed before November 1995 and requirements for ECOMOG.

The EU's apparent priority is to assist Nigeria in its transition toward democracy, but Abacha has realized that, given U.S. opposition and continuing crises in Iran and Iraq, the EU will not impose oil sanctions, nor will it try to destabilize his government. Basically, then, Abacha has been able to ignore the pressures from Brussels. The economic interests of British and French companies, particularly in the oil sector, prevent the EU from imposing tougher sanctions. The EU is important to Abacha, however, in providing development assistance and in maintaining the confidence of European investors, and so he cannot afford to ostracize it completely. However, Nigeria is not aid-dependent upon the EU and thus cannot be pressured very successfully on that front either. In addition, some 60 percent of its Paris Club debt is to EU countries, a fact that has some bearing on oil sanctions debates.

The apparent result of these relationships is a stalemate. Noises from the EU Commission in Brussels, and talk of reining in EU-based companies, have been heard. But in reality, little happens to affect the status quo, due to pressure from European oil companies. EU ambassadors were quick to return to Nigeria after the temporary diplomatic storm in November 1995, and attempts to work on Abacha through quiet diplomacy still fill the agenda. Abacha has displayed diplomatic adroitness and learned from the outrage over the killing of the Ogoni Nine. EU pressure may at least prevent a reoccurrence of such executions, but Abacha appears content to hold his opponents in detention without trial for the indefinite future.

The United States: A Fluctuating Friendship

Nigeria's relations with the United States have not been as intense or as important as those with Europe, but they have been significant nevertheless. At independence, the United States saw Nigeria as an important ally because of its moderate diplomatic positions taken on African issues and its opposition to socialism in the Cold War arena. In addition, Nigeria's hostility toward France prevented it from
developing a Gaullist view of the Cold War and nonalignment. The United States had a tracking station based in Kano, which was closed in 1966; military assistance, begun in 1964, was worth $1.3 million by 1966.

The United States, however, consciously deferred to Britain because Nigeria was deemed to be within the latter’s sphere of influence, and European powers were best seen as furthering anticommunist interests in Africa. U.S. aloofness was especially noticeable during the civil war when President Johnson, distracted by the Vietnam War and tensions in the Middle East following the Six-Day War, laid down an arms embargo against both sides, and withdrew to allow Britain to seek some form of diplomatic settlement. President Nixon was apparently very sympathetic to the Biafran cause and planned to recognize Biafra, but he was dissuaded from doing so by Henry Kissinger and the British. The U.S. government ultimately allowed some engagement following intense domestic pressure for humanitarian relief to Biafra, but only over the State Department’s objections.\(^2\)

Although Nigeria was officially pursuing nonalignment, its relations displayed little balance during the First Republic: Its relations with the socialist bloc were cool, and the burgeoning petroleum industry led to a greater intensity of U.S. relations in the 1970s, contributing to a firmer American policy toward Nigeria and the rest of Africa during the later part of the Nixon–Kissinger administration. However, as mentioned previously, U.S.-Nigeria relations were sorely tested during the Muhammed government, especially over Angola.\(^3\)

Nigeria’s oil wealth combined with its self-promotion as Africa’s leader forced U.S. policymakers to beat a path to Lagos. In April 1978 this effort included President Jimmy Carter, the first serving president in the post–World War II era to visit Sub-Saharan Africa while in office.\(^4\) Carter, working through his ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, needed to patch up the differences that had occurred over Angola in 1975 and perceived a strong role for Nigeria in promoting continental stability and prosperity—a role that was strengthened after its return to civilian rule in 1979. Furthermore, Carter hoped to use Nigeria as a market for American goods and as a springboard into ECOWAS and the rest of Africa, as well as a vehicle through which stabilization and settlements in Namibia and Zimbabwe could be achieved. As Bassey Ate notes: “The United States was willing to concede to Nigeria the position of preeminence in African affairs.”\(^5\)

In turn, Nigeria hoped to utilize its position as the second largest supplier of oil to the United States to force the latter to change its Africa policies, notably those pertaining to Southern Africa. It also hoped to use U.S. sponsorship to improve its status in the continent and to promote a wider agenda of Pan-Africanism and support for Africans in the diaspora, including those inside the United States. As two prominent scholars wrote at the time, “There can no nobler task for Nigeria to accomplish than to employ prudently Nigeria’s leverage to obtain accelerated justice and freedom for all blacks.”\(^6\) Nevertheless, this policy of dialogue with the United States needed some delicate maneuvering to avoid setting off a domestic backlash over perception of Nigeria as a puppet of American imperialism.\(^7\)
Unfortunately, a combination of factors led to worsening relations in the early 1980s. Included in this scenario were Nigeria’s declining economic fortunes. For example, U.S. imports of Nigerian oil were halved between 1977 and 1982, relegating the country to the status of fifth largest supplier. In addition, the January 1981 inauguration of a less sympathetic president, Ronald Reagan, and the rekindling of the Cold War brought a more global than regionalist focus to American policy. As a result, the relative importance of Nigeria was further downgraded, although many U.S. petroleum multinationals continued to expand their economic interests and investments in the country. By all accounts, Shagari and Reagan could not match the warm relations of previous leaders, and Shagari was much more cautious in his foreign policy stances. Africa’s marginal importance to the United States was always a factor influencing U.S.-Nigerian relations. As Robert Shepard sums up: “American power has alternated between an effort to maintain close diplomatic relations with Nigeria on the one hand, and a policy of benign neglect on the other.”

This somewhat paradoxical relationship extended into the 1990s. At the time, the Gulf War and other Middle East tensions had strengthened Nigeria in the oil markets, leading the United States to take 45 percent of its total production; but Nigeria’s failed democratization program, human rights violations, and increasing role in the international drug trade left relations between the countries tense. The U.S. State Department accused the Nigerian government of complicity in the drug trade in 1994, claiming that Nigerian couriers were responsible for 40 percent of all heroin entering the United States.

A major African-American lobby group, TransAfrica, which had led the struggle against apartheid South Africa, along with other African-American lobbies, heightened pressures on the Nigerian and U.S. governments by developing a very strong campaign against the military regime and casting Nigeria as the South Africa of the 1990s. Other African-American communities, however, now support the Abacha government, and TransAfrica has not been successful in pushing for oil sanctions.

In particular, TransAfrica’s pressures have been insufficient to disrupt the lobbying of powerful oil groups that point to possible gain by China and Iran if oil sanctions are imposed. These pressures have been supported by the Abacha government’s lavish public-relations campaign in Washington, a side effect of which has been to divide the African-American community over Nigeria. Included in the PR campaign were U.S. firms such as Washington and Christian; Barron-Birrell; APCO Associates; and Symms, Lehn and Associates. According to one commentator, “However many await the hangman in Nigeria, lobbyists are in a frenzy for the money it throws around.”

Without developing oil sanctions, however, the United States was limited in terms of the pressure it could exert, or perhaps wanted to exert. An inquiry by the U.S. General Accounting Office in 1994 concluded that a unilateral U.S. boycott of Nigerian oil would be ineffective, and that a collective boycott by Western states...
was unnecessary.\textsuperscript{81} The U.S. State Department, partly owing to organizational inertia, has tended to prefer stable and predictable rulers in Africa rather than the opposite, as demonstrated by long-term U.S. support for Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire.\textsuperscript{82}

Despite much verbal support for democracy, the United States has been unclear about how to achieve it in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{83} However, George Moose, undersecretary of state for African affairs, summed up in 1995 that the United States has continued "to seek a high-level dialogue with Nigeria. We have pressed this dialogue both privately and publicly. We believe that frank exchange of views can only increase understanding and may advance positive change."\textsuperscript{84} This "frank exchange" was carried out by U.S. Ambassador Walter Carrington, posted to Abuja from November 1993 to September 1997. His highly visible attacks on human rights violations and drug smugglers led to a substantial freeze in relations between the two countries, but not in business. In return, the government accused Carrington of siding with prodemocracy groups and being implicated in various bombings across the country. Ultimately, the Nigerian military raided the house where Carrington's departure party was being held, doing little to help its cause with the United States.\textsuperscript{85}

**Socialist Countries: Ambivalence and Unease**

Nigeria had few if any ties to the socialist bloc at independence. The Balewa government refused to accept aid from socialist countries, banned its nationals from visiting the socialist bloc, and opposed those African leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah, who espoused socialism. In 1961 the government refused to attend the NAM conference because of its anti-Western agenda. Diplomatic links with the Soviet Union opened as late as 1962, and aid was received for the first time in April 1966. Further links were developed with the USSR and Eastern Europe only at a time of federal need during the civil war.\textsuperscript{86} The USSR and Eastern Europe were eager to supply the arms that Western states had expressed reluctance about. They began to supply fighter planes in 1967, often on a barter system for petroleum, and also initiated training programs for the federal military. In addition, the USSR sought to consolidate linkages with radical communities and political parties inside Nigeria. In March 1969 a Soviet-Nigerian Chamber of Commerce was established. And following the war, there was a continuation of relations in trade and economic development issues, though not at the level hoped for by the USSR or Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{87}

One significant effort was Russia's construction of the Ajaokuta steelworks, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Ostensibly intended to promote Nigerian self-sufficiency, the project became a development nightmare. It was given great praise in the early months, but construction dragged on for many years beyond the deadline, generating substantial bitterness on both sides. In the end, few believed that the plant could ever be profitable.
With glasnost, perestroika, and the eventual dismemberment of the Soviet Union in 1991, confidence was shaken among those who "had successfully questioned the veracity of a Western path to economic and political development. At a global level, it fundamentally compromised the little diplomatic and strategic leverage African states enjoyed in the Cold War era." Within Nigeria itself, this "Western path" deflated the possibilities of radical alternatives to the capitalist development model, leaving the country more exposed to the influence of the IMF and the World Bank. More specifically, it increased the prospect of trade competition in EU markets with Central European states, especially in fertilizers.

Nigeria's relations with China were never as important as those with the USSR, and successive governments steered clear of China's overt radicalism in the 1960s and early 1970s. China had welcomed the first coup of January 1966, which overthrew the "reactionary" pro-Western Biafra government, but it maintained an astute silence following the second coup and throughout the civil war. One explanation for this silence is that China had attempted to befriend radicals across the country and thus did not wish to antagonize any particular ethnic group; another is that its trade with Nigeria was the third largest in Africa, and the Chinese government did not wish to upset the federal government. However, once the USSR became a main weapons supplier to the federal side, China was more openly supportive of Biafra, stopping short of recognition. After the end of the civil war, this situation soured the atmosphere between the two countries for some time to come.

The Nigeria-China relationship became closer in the mid-1990s, when the Abacha government sought leverage in its relations with the West. Chinese companies were brought in to assist with the reconstruction of two oil refineries, and China also became an important trading partner, not least in terms of oil exports and weapons imports. An April 1996 trade agreement paralleled similar agreements with Iran and North Korea, clearly indicating where Nigeria's government placed itself in the international system.

**International Organizations: Arenas of Action**

I have already remarked on the propensity of developing countries to seek roles in IGOs to compensate for their relative weakness in pursuing "independent" foreign policies. In Nigeria's case, strong support for IGOs was forthcoming even when the country appeared to have the capability to pursue policies bilaterally. It is possible to conclude that successive governments sought out leadership roles in these IGOs in order to assert the country's status and prestige, as well as to pursue identifiable interests. Equally important have been the numerous military contributions to peacekeeping forces, primarily those of the UN. These Nigerian troop contributions included the Congo in 1960–1965, Tanzania in 1964, Kashmir in 1965, Lebanon in 1979–1982, Chad in 1981–1982, Iran and Iraq in 1988, Namibia in 1989–1990, Yugoslavia and Rwanda in 1992, and Somalia in 1993. In the
post–Cold War era, it is expected that the country’s peacekeeping roles will increase throughout the continent, somewhat along the lines of ECOMOG.93

However, regarding the leadership positions given to Nigerians in many of these IGOs, it is important to note the status accorded by other countries. Babangida served an unprecedented three years as chair of ECOWAS, and also one year as OAU chair in 1991; Joe Garba served as president of the UN General Assembly; Rilwanu Lukman served six terms as president of OPEC; and Emeka Anyaoku has served since 1991 as Commonwealth secretary-general, despite the embarrassment of having to supervise the suspension of Nigerian membership in that organization in 1995. (Many Nigerians were disappointed when Olusegun Obasanjo was not elected as UN secretary-general in 1991; and, unfortunately, he was in jail for treason when a second chance came up in 1996.) One could also add Nigeria’s leadership role in the ACP group to this impressive list of achievements.

Nigeria’s relationship with the Commonwealth is perhaps worthy of a quick comment here. Ties with the old colonial power have not sat well with recent political elites, and the Commonwealth has been the victim of repeated political attacks. Nevertheless, leaving the organization has never been a realistic policy option, and governments have benefited from shaping African policy within the organization. It is somewhat ironic, then, that the Commonwealth turned on Nigeria and suspended its membership following the execution of the Ogoni Nine. This action was taken at a time when the fortunes of the Commonwealth reached an apex, counting South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique as members (along with a possible Palestinian application in 1998).

The democratization process is under scrutiny by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) and must be “certified” before Nigeria returns to the fold. In September 1997, the CMAG decided that insufficient progress had been made to allow the country to resume its membership, and further sanctions were planned.94 The fact that Nigeria wants to return is interesting in itself. Indeed, Tom Ikimi, the foreign minister, has challenged the members of Vision 2010 to come up with good reasons to justify Nigeria’s continuing membership in the organization.95

Nigerian intransigence and diplomacy appear to have worn down the collective will of the Commonwealth, much to the chagrin of hard-line Canada, and many members are anxious to get the country back in. On that front, it is unlikely that the Commonwealth will have anything more than a marginal impact on the democratization process, a fact lamented by Shridath (“Sonny”) Ramphal, a former secretary-general.96 Certainly the sanctions imposed in 1996 were weak, in that they merely restricted visas for members of the regime and families, ended arms sales and military training, banned sporting contacts, and downgraded cultural links.97 Arguably, the decision by FIFA, the international soccer federation, to withdraw the World Youth Championships from Nigeria in 1995 had a much greater impact on the country.
Conclusion: Restoring Status and Prestige?

Nigeria clearly faces a tough time in its evolving position within the international system. Although its petroleum and gas make it a favorable investment destination in these sectors, there is little foreign investment coming into other sectors. Diversification of its exports is not occurring. Its infrastructure is crumbling, and its university research and development base is declining. Indeed, it is difficult to see how its producers and manufacturers can compete on the global market. During the 1990s, however, foreign policy has taken on a crucial economic dimension in an effort to foster a more stable economy for the country. This policy, often called "economic diplomacy," is long overdue.

Meanwhile, the continuation of military rule has ostracized many supporters outside the country. A failure to stick to the 1998 transition deadline will seriously weaken external support and possibly goad Western powers into tougher sanctions. The Abacha government has responded with a massive public-relations campaign across Europe and in Washington in an attempt to modify possible negative policies, and it has been helped somewhat by the lobbies of the major oil corporations. The campaign has included a PR video about the nation's strength of character and has entailed the recruitment of numerous PR companies.

The growing unity within Europe under the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, combined with the ambivalence of continuing support for Lomé despite official protestations, has also weakened Nigeria's linkages to Europe. The rise of postapartheid South Africa offers a more democratic and more economically sound alternative in Africa, thereby drawing investment and attention from outside Africa to the southern tip of the continent. Nigeria, in short, is less important politically than it used to be. This fact is hard to swallow not only for the government but also for average citizens, who have become resentful (perhaps at the government's instigation) of the challenge put to the country's "natural" international status by South Africa.

On the other hand, such obstacles can possibly be overcome if the government is able to resuscitate the economy and stabilize the domestic arena in a civilian transition. Greater integrated development of the ECOWAS region would also be a major bonus, though an unlikely one in the current regional climate. The odds are working against the country somewhat, thus lowering the prospects for Nigerian diplomacy to acquire and retain the status and influence sought.

Notes

1. See, for example, Joseph Wayas, Nigeria's Leadership Role in Africa (London: Macmillan, 1979) (Wayas was leader of the Senate in the Second Republic), and James Mayall, "Oil and Nigerian Foreign Policy," African Affairs, 75, July 1976, pp. 317–330.


20. Francophone countries in the region have retained strong linkages to each other; for further discussion, see Patrick Manning, Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880–1985 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).


27. Herman J. Cohen, ”Political and Military Security,” in Harbeson and Rothchild (eds.), Africa in World Politics, pp. 278–294. Cohen argues that in the changing post–Cold War environment, regional security initiatives such as ECOMOG will become more common. See also Edmond J. Keller and Donald Rothchild (eds.), Africa in the New International Order: Rethinking State Sovereignty and Regional Security (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), as well as


35. Gambari, Theory and Reality in Foreign Policy Making, p. 13. Gambari served as permanent representative to the UN under Abacha.


45. Stephen Wright, “Nigeria: The Politics of Sport,” *The Round Table*, 272, October 1978, pp. 362–367. Nigeria voiced support of its own participation in the 1980 Moscow Olympics to show that it was not subservient to the United States in the latter’s call for a boycott. Toward this end, Nigeria had to ignore a British international rugby team touring South Africa just prior to the Olympics.

46. For an extensive review of foreign policy in the 1970s, see Aluko, *Essays in Nigerian Foreign Policy*.


48. Nigeria boycotted the African Nations Cup in December 1996 in South Africa, ostensibly because its players could not be guaranteed protection, but more so because of the intense bitterness existing between the two countries. The African Football Confederation placed a four-year ban on Nigeria, later cut to two years.

49. For further discussion of the commonality of this paradox among African states, see Amadu Sesay (ed.), *Africa and Europe: From Partition to Interdependence or Dependence?* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).


53. Gambari, *Theory and Reality in Foreign Policy Making*, p. 150. A decade later, Dikko was welcomed back to Nigeria and served on Abacha’s constitutional conference.


61. The conferences in question were held in Kano in March and April, and in Lagos in August. Nigeria also hosted a conference in 1980.


70. In 1992, for example, Nigeria received only $44.32 million in aid from the EU. The recipients of by far the largest amounts were Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire.


74. Carter made this trip partly in response to Obasanjo’s official visit to the United States in October 1977, which went well despite some opposition from radical quarters in Nigeria.


82. For interesting coverage of these policies, see Peter J. Schraeder, United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
89. Oladeji O. Ojo and Christopher Stevens, “Recent Changes in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for Africa,” in Ojo (ed.), Africa and Europe, ch. 5.
91. See, for example, Mahmud Tukur, “Nigeria’s External Relations: The United Nations as a Forum and Policy Medium in the Conduct of Foreign Policy October 1960–December 1965” (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University, undated).
94. Reuters: Infosseek, 12 September 1997. At this time, the CMAG members were Britain, Canada, Ghana, Jamaica, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.
Two central themes have been discussed throughout this book—namely, Nigeria's struggle for political, economic, and societal stability within the domestic arena, and its search for status, prestige, and influence primarily in the international arena. In terms of domestic stability, as we have seen, numerous problems originated before independence and continue to cast a shadow over the country.

Such pressures include ethnic divisions and conflicts among the larger ethnic groups and between them and minority groups; the inexorable pressure for the creation of new states within the federation; the ongoing debate about the "best" political structure for the nation, whether federal, confederal, unitary, or secessionary, and how "best" might be defined by different groups; problems occurring between federal and state levels of government, especially during the two civilian republics; instability within the political elite, and the struggle between ethnic and ideological factions; and, finally, instability within the military elite, as represented (among other factors) by coups and countercoups.

The fact that civilian governments have ruled for less than one-quarter of the years since independence is in itself a telling indictment of the overall nature of political instability. Within the long periods of military rule have been several "transition periods," which, almost by definition, represent significant tension and uncertainty themselves. For example, Yakubu Gowon's transition program fizzled out, contributing not only to his own overthrow but also to the radical, unsettling, yet interesting interlude under Murtala Muhammed's leadership.
As another example, consider Olusegun Obasanjo’s transition. Requiring nearly four years and tremendous energy to accomplish, it ushered in the Second Republic along with a new set of tensions. To his credit, Obasanjo remains the only Nigerian head-of-state to have relinquished office by design in almost forty years of independence; Ibrahim Babangida’s departure, though peaceful, was not according to plan. Of course, the development of peaceful leadership succession is an important element of building political stability. The current transition program is slated to last thirteen years, if one calculates on the basis of the Babangida and Abacha programs combined. Such a long, drawn-out transition exacerbates political instability, which is perhaps the military’s intention.

A controversial conclusion that might be drawn from all this discussion is that “Nigeria does not work and probably cannot work.”1 The thrust of this argument is that the artificiality of the Nigerian state is simply too much to overcome, given the clientelism, the corruption, and the demands of elite groups. Ken Saro-Wiwa made a related point when he wrote that, “[a]s organized today, the country is not a workable possibility. There is no country. There is only organized brigandage.”2

According to those who invoke this picture of severe internal dislocation and disunity, it is only after “reality” is faced up to and accepted that more politically viable entities and structures can be created. Nigeria, they propose, could be retained under a very different framework (specifically, a looser one), or perhaps it could be disbanded. Since preindependence there has been an undercurrent of debate on this theme, but it is heard increasingly today. It is still very much a minority perspective, however, as the majority continues to support the concept of federation, which also seems the most viable choice economically.

So, if we accept the likely continuation of the Nigerian state, what conclusions can be drawn about the issues and events that will occupy the agenda until 2000? One answer based on this discussion is that it is extremely difficult to create a democratic framework for the country under such hostile conditions. Under the Abacha transition, the people who offer the most hope for democracy happen to be the ones most constrained by the military: They are in jail, in exile, deliberately excluded from the transition process, or simply intimidated. (Others have been assassinated.) It is often asserted that the military elite seeks to gain from this instability, thereby keeping the country on edge and providing a justification for its continuing rule and presence. If this is the case, then long-term political instability is likely, as few if any critical problems can be solved through military rule.

The instability of the country is fairly easy to document, but perhaps more disconcerting is the increasing brutality of the military regimes, especially the current Abacha regime. An important source of information on this subject is Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka’s latest book, aptly titled The Open Sore of a Continent,3 a chilling, powerful, and emotive account of military leadership since Buhari: fourteen years of brutal and inhumane government culminating in the government of Sani Abacha. Here Soyinka, who fled Nigeria into exile in the United States in
November 1994, launches an unreserved attack on Abacha. This is what he has written about the annulled 1993 presidential election:

After the initial noises of realism and surrender to a popular, democratic will, the reprobates of the old order recovered their breath and recollected their endangered interests, regrouped, and ranged themselves behind a moldy concept of an eternal right to governance and control. The latest instrument of their feudal, despotic will is General Abacha, the last in the line of the reign of deception, of obfuscating rhetoric and cant in the service of a straightforward will to domination by an anachronistic bunch of social predators. Their notion of a historic mandate of power is not only warped and mindless; it may prove terminal to the existence of the nation if its most faithful facilitator to date, Abacha, succeeds in clinging to office for much longer.4

A similar message has been conveyed by the president of the Organization of Nigerians in the Americas: “Nigeria has always had very bad governments. Yet, the current regime is the most corrupt, repressive, visionless, confused, and crude in terms of its politics and policies.”5

From Soyinka one gets a deep foreboding of even worse things to come under Abacha and little sense that Abacha is making any effort at all to turn the country in a positive direction. Soyinka’s increasingly vocal calls for revolution are given some underpinning not only by his account of despair but also through his own prodemocracy party, the National Liberation Council of Nigeria (NALICON). And yet one is uplifted by the spirit of democratic defiance in which the book is written.

It appears unlikely, despite the provocation posed by some opposition groups, that a revolution is imminent, as the required level of class consciousness and organization is not present. As one commentator has concluded:

But, by itself, the labour movement remains too small and divided to constitute such a movement. Given the distribution of coercive power in Nigerian society, no revolutionary bloc could sustain itself against the international and local elite forces without support in the military. The increasingly radicalised cadre of junior officers, backed perhaps by elements among the rank and file, would at the very least have to ensure the military’s neutrality in such an event.6

Moving beyond political factors, we must realize that the economic conditions facing Nigeria are not particularly conducive to the development of democracy at this time. Structural adjustment has not brought the marked gains that were promised by the World Bank a decade ago, and key quality-of-life indicators have worsened in recent years. The Abacha administration can get very little debt relief from international agencies, and little foreign investment is forthcoming, except in the lucrative petroleum and gas sectors. One could speculate that if oil earnings had been used wisely and efficiently in the past, this income would be sufficient to turn the economy around. But as discussed, Nigeria has been beset by obscene corruption over the years, with billions of dollars of oil revenue unaccounted for during the Gowon, Obasanjo, Buhari, Babangida, and Abacha regimes.
There is no evidence to suggest that this peculation will stop, and much to suggest that it will continue and possibly even increase. And how can any country build stable economic development on the basis of a single commodity? Nigeria's inability to diversify over the past two decades is yet another troubling sign pointing to continuing instability within the economic sector.

In terms of the second underlying theme introduced earlier—that of seeking status and the respect of others—it is important to note that many Nigerians are proud of the international policies that have been pursued and assume that the majority of West Africans secretly have a longing to be Nigerian. Successive governments have worked through ECOWAS to shape the region to their interests. Even in these unsettling times under the current administration, there is a belief that the region and the continent remains envious of what Nigeria is and stands for.

Successive governments have cultivated Nigeria's status and stature outside of the continent. One could make the case that during the oil-boom years of the 1970s and early 1980s, and given its population size and market potential, Nigeria was successful in winning the admiration and respect of European countries and the United States. But here we must differentiate between the terms status and influence: Nigerian governments were granted respect in the international arena, but this status did not always translate into influence capable of changing the policies of others.

We would have to conclude that even the element of status has receded somewhat over the past five years, owing to both declining economic fortunes and the repressive character of the military elite. Although regime type has unfortunately not mattered very much within Africa when it comes to trade and political relations, there is some embarrassment within Europe and the United States over having to deal with a brutal leader. Of course, European and American multinationals have fewer qualms about such circumstances and may even support a regime that can "handle" and control its population. The West was able to support a repugnant figure such as Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko for more than thirty years, so we should not expect too much moralism from Western governments. Interestingly, efforts by some shareholders to require Shell to formally promote environmental and human rights in Nigeria were firmly resisted by the company in May 1997.

The language from the West continues to encompass such terms as patience and dialogue: Only through cooperation with the military can progress be achieved. But this is not what is actually happening. While the West persists in its use of soft diplomatic tactics, the Abacha government is eliminating opposition, including the forces of popular democracy. To say, as Western business does, that those who are "allowed" to stand for controlled elections will move Nigeria on to democratic stability is simply to engage in convenient nonsense. Soyinka decried the West following the charges made against him for treason: "Yet the world watches in cold complicity as this conspiracy to eliminate all real and imaginary opponents to Abacha's dictatorship is concretised." But many Western and
Nigerian businesspeople wish to promote their personal economic advancement and thus dismiss the "crazy" ideas of "radical academics."

At this stage, in contrast to the previous thirty years, there is an alternative to Nigeria toward which the West can legitimately be deferential and praiseworthy—namely, South Africa, whose economic base and government are more substantial than Nigeria's. This rivalry has provided an interesting dynamic to the relations between South Africa and Nigeria over the last four years, and it is likely to continue. One hypothetical issue that has many Nigerians gasping concerns a permanent African seat on the UN Security Council, which Nigerians claim as rightfully theirs even as it pits the country against its "natural rival" to the south.

Intellectuals and human rights activists are particularly torn by this struggle for status today. As patriotic and proud Nigerians, they obviously want their country to be courted and respected within the international arena; but given the antics of the Abacha administration, they want the government to be vilified and ostracized—actions that would tend to cast a shadow on themselves as well. They have little choice but to live with such ambivalence. Perhaps the most important question to raise at this juncture is whether the transition to civilian rule scheduled for October 1998 will go smoothly. Success in the transition must be judged not only in terms of whether there is a transfer of government to civilians in 1998, which is quite possible, but also, more substantially, in terms of whether progress is made in developing true democratic attitudes and values to support a long-term stable government. Unfortunately, the odds are very much against the latter outcome, because it requires a very lengthy process; indeed, some observers believe that a transition will not take place at all, and that the military will continue to extend the "transition" indefinitely.

Another possible scenario is that Abacha will imitate Jerry Rawlings of Ghana (among others) and stand for the presidency himself, planning to manipulate from the center the manner in which "democratic" politics plays out. This appeared to be likely when all five political parties nominated Abacha as sole presidential candidate in April 1998. Alternatively, the military might formally bow out of office but continue to influence outcomes from behind the scenes, operating through its hand-picked civilian politicians. Given that the military has screened and vetted the politicians running for office in 1998, and has confused the concepts of unity and uniformity in fashioning the political climate and arena in which these politicians are operating, we are hard-pressed to see the creation of any long-term democratic stability. Jailing democrats is hardly the ideal way to create democracy.

Based on the progress of the present transition exercise, we can further speculate that a new (northern-based) civilian government composed of anxious opportunists with little "popular" support, combined with substantial revenues from oil and gas, will lead to large-scale corruption. As for the political elite, the perception that it will remain in power for only a year or two before the military returns may lead its less principled members to grab as much money as they can as quickly as they can. So, under this scenario, instead of moving Nigeria ahead,
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civilian rule may well move the country backward into greater corruption, spiraling into another bout of long-term military rule.

The elite quite simply has nothing much to gain by the promotion of true democracy:

For the Nigerian political class, democracy is hardly desirable if it means popular empowerment of the masses. Democracy is desirable if it can facilitate access to power, create a window of opportunity to loot the public treasury and keep the people in check and at their mercy. If and when such an opening is perceived, then the political class strives to negotiate the exit of the military from power. Otherwise it does not matter if the military retains power and keeps shifting the democratization goal-post, so long as they can be in the game.9

Unfortunately, there is only a slim prospect that ordinary citizens will have a voice in the political outcome, in keeping with the basis of Western liberal democracy: “[W]orkers, artisans, small traders and small farmers are not politically organized because there is no democracy, but there can be no democracy because the people are not organized. Only when the circle is broken can there be any real advance.”10

Given the military’s propensity to subvert the transition to democracy, what should be the role of the international community, particularly in the West? There is evidence to suggest that the United States and the EU countries are trying their level-best not to do anything. Abacha has been skillful in manipulating the situation and holding off the limp protests. With the major oil companies feverishly lobbying for the status quo or better, hostile to the option of oil sanctions and ambivalent at best about the concept of democracy, it is unlikely that Western governments will do anything serious to unsettle Abacha, despite rumblings from the new Labour government in London.

If this is the case, what can be done to promote democracy and long-term stability in Nigeria? Perhaps we can draw on the lessons of South Africa and conclude that some beneficial pressure could be applied from outside the country, but also that the greater pressure must come from the people within. Since independence, radicals have talked about creating a momentum toward revolution. That this outcome has not occurred has been explained in terms of the difficulties involved in mobilizing class consciousness, and also, perhaps, in terms of the controversial assessment that Nigerians are not natural revolutionaries. The Abacha government, through its actions, has revived the dialogue of revolution; but, as noted earlier, widespread alienation and apathy have to be overcome before such a scenario is even possible, let alone likely.

The most likely scenario is that human rights activists will continue to push their agenda of reform, all the while trying to draw in support from the grassroots, striving to coordinate their work to minimize regional and ethnic tensions, and hoping to influence the outcome of the transition exercise and beyond in seeking a more transparent and accountable government. To date, these activists have been easy prey for government manipulation and control, and the critical question is whether they can withstand further intimidation. Greater grassroots support and mass mo-
Epilogue: Prospects for Stability and Status

Bilization could reverse this situation, as could financial support for the human rights movement from the EU and the United States. These activists also need to determine the economic conditions within which democracy will flourish rather than narrowly focusing on political issues. Indeed, it is the prodemocracy movement, and not Abacha or his transition, that offers the best hope for a solution to long-term societal instability through serious debate about the Nigerian condition.

A final question to pose here concerns the means by which the military in all its manifestations could be educated to support the democratic process and leave politics for good. What sort of incentives or assurances could be given to the military to allow it to give up the reins of office? How might its thirst for power be quenched? How can the cycle of military rule be broken? Of course, there are no easy answers. However, it is true that a poor civilian government provides a much easier invitation to the military than an accountable democratic and populist government. Unfortunately, the annulment of the 1993 Abiola victory suggests that the military is fully aware of this dictum.

As we look somewhat apprehensively at the transition exercise, our overwhelming impression is that what occurs will be only what the military elite wants to occur. With that in mind, we must accept the unlikelihood of long-term democratic development or even sustainable quasi-democratic civilian rule. In this sense, then, we are looking ahead to the past: Past mistakes are likely to be made again. On the other hand, if this negative assessment is proven wrong and a "true" transition occurs, it will be merely the beginning of a long road toward the negotiation and creation of a stable Nigeria. Yet we can only sincerely hope that the country begins on that course in 1998.

Notes

5. Julius O. Ihonvbere, before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canadian House of Commons, 14 December 1995.
7. This assumption is the official view of the Abacha government; it also represents a defense against the question of why numerous Nigerians are involved in the drugs trade. According to Abacha, these people are not really "Nigerian" but, rather, simply say they are so out of respect for the country.


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Stephen Wright is professor of political science at Northern Arizona University.