The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else.

--Chinua Achebe

**Nigeria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>823,770 km² (about twice the size of California)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infant mortality</td>
<td>69.46 per 1,000 births</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life expectancy</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major religions</td>
<td>50% Muslim, 40% Christian, 10% indigenous religions</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>$300, $820 PPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic growth</td>
<td>1.1% (1997-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>$1=95 Naira (29 October 1999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Outline**

A New Democracy?
Thinking About Nigeria

The Evolution of the Nigerian State

Political Culture and Participation

The Fragile Nigerian State

Public Policy and Public Futility

Nigeria and the Plight of the Third World

**A New Democracy?**

On 29 May 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in as the first president of Nigeria’s newest republic. Like Nelson Mandela’s inauguration in South Africa five years earlier, the world was watching the new government carefully.

Nigeria is, after all, Africa’s largest country with over one million people (no one knows for sure how many Nigerians there are, since no census has been conducted for years, for reasons that
will become clear later in the chapter). It is also has extensive oil reserves which should also make it one of the richest country’s in Africa.

However, as the statement by award-winning novelist, Chinua Achebe, suggests, Nigeria’s history has been plagued by troubles of many sorts. On the day of Obasanjo’s inauguration, most observers focused on the fact that the country had been ruled by the military for more than half of its 39 years as an independent country. And, despite its oil and other natural resources, the average Nigerian was worse off than in 1960 when the country gained its independence.

Obasanjo himself was the object of much of the attention. Though himself once a military ruler of the country in the 1970s, he had become one of the continent’s leading advocates for reform and democracy in the 20 years after he had turned over power to the civilian second republic. Indeed, he had been so outspoken in his criticism of the outgoing military regime that, like Mandela, he had been put in prison for treason and had faced the death penalty.

Nigeria’s sorry history had reached a new low after 1993. That year, then-military strongman Ibrahim Babangida refused to accept the results of an election that apparently had been won by the business executive, Moshood Abiola, who was subsequently arrested. Babangida stepped aside, but he was replaced shortly thereafter by the far more ruthless and corrupt General Sani Abacha, who treated the country as all but his personal fiefdom. The regime cracked down on dissidents—real and imagined—culminating in the execution of the author and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1996. The government gained some international support for sending its troops to neighboring countries on peacekeeping missions, but took more criticism for its human rights and economic policies. It got to the point that one joke put it that Abacha’s Nigeria exported what it didn’t have (pro-democratic troops) and imported what it already had (oil).

Suddenly, in summer 1998, Abacha died. The presidency was handed to yet another general, Abdulsalami Abubakar. In the face of considerable pressure at home and from abroad, Abubakar announced plans for a speedy return to democratic rule, which was to begin with the release of Abiola. He, then, suddenly died as well. Riots broke out which only intensified the pressure on the new military rulers to cede power, which they did. The extent of the change is perhaps best symbolized in the presidential election that pitted two recently freed political prisoners against each other—Obasanjo and Olu Falae, a former civil servant and Finance Minister.

Obasanjo took office with a degree of popular support and enthusiasm the country hadn’t seen since the first heady days after gaining its independence. Interviews by western journalists with average citizens showed widespread support for democracy and the new president, something no Nigerian government had enjoyed in thirty years.

There is good reason, however, to be cautious, especially when drawing parallels to the remarkable transition in South Africa. Government corruption has been so widespread that civil servants are often referred to as lootocrats. More importantly for our purposes, the corruption and economic failures of past regimes leave Nigerians and foreigners alike skeptical than real growth can be sustained at high enough rates to address the country’s wrenching poverty. Perhaps most importantly of all, the ethnic divisions that helped undermine the first two republics (and which
will be at the heart of much of what follows in this chapter) have only eased somewhat. While not a major, divisive force in the 1999 election, they could well pose a problem for a new regime in which voting still largely breaks down along regional lines.

**Nigeria: The Basics**

**Nigeria and Its Troubles**

Nigeria does have a lot going for it. It has the largest population in Africa. Indeed, almost one in every five Africans is a Nigerian. It is blessed with some of the most fertile soil on the continent, only a tiny fraction of which is regularly cultivated. It has a relatively well-educated population, including at least two million citizens with a university education. Vast oil and gas deposits have brought it more money than most other Africans can dream of.

That Nigeria had these assets (except for the oil) was clear before it gained its independence in 1960. Therefore, most observers expected Nigeria to help lead the continent in building strong states, democratic regimes, and modern economies.

Yet, as Achebe also suggests in the statement that begins the chapter, Nigeria has had more than its share of trouble. Whether run by civilians or the military, the state has no lived up to expectations. There have been times, as during the civil war of 1967-1970 over Biafra, when it could be argued that there was no Nigerian state, if by that we mean an entity that can maintain basic law and order. Even when the state has enjoyed a modicum of stability, it has been wracked by corruption, ethnic divisions, and poor organization, leaving the country's decision makers unable to carry out their policies in any kind of effective manner.

**Economic Conditions**

Perhaps the most tragic of Nigeria’s problems is its failure to reach its economic potential. Despite its substantial natural and human resources, Nigeria remains desperately poor. From 1965 until 1980, Nigeria's GNP grew by an average of 6.9 percent per year, reflecting in large part the substantial growth it was able to achieve through limited industrial development and the export of oil. From 1980 to 1987, however the economy shrank by an average of 1.7 percent per year—a total of over 40 percent for the period as a whole. When oil prices were at their peak in the early 1980s, GNP per capita averaged around $700 per year. By 1990, it had been cut by more than half.

Today, as the basic table shows, Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its unadjusted GNP per capita of $300 a year leaves it in one hundred sixty fourth place. The per capita GNP PPP (purchasing power parity) figure looks better at first glance--$820—but it ranks one hundred ninety ninth of the two hundred nine countries covered in the World Bank’s 2000 *World Development Report*. In 1997-98 overall growth barely topped one percent, but when measured on a per capita basis the economy actually shrank a bit.
These are not just abstract statistics. There has been some real improvement in the way many people live. Nonetheless, the average Nigerian leads an appallingly difficult life that is worse in most ways than the situations in the other third world countries covered in *Comparative Politics*.

About 7 percent of all Nigerian children do not reach the age of one; 18 percent die before their fifth birthday. Most of those children succumb to malnutrition or diseases like diarrhea that could easily be treated or prevented if the country had the resources. People who do survive their childhood can only expect to live to 53. The average Nigerian only consumes between 85 and 90 percent of the calories required to maintain a healthy life, a figure that has actually declined from 95 percent in the mid-1960s. Only 38 percent have access to safe drinking water. There are about 6,440 Nigerians for every doctor. In Mexico, the comparable figure is 1,242. Only about half of the population is literate.

Like most of Africa, Nigeria also remains a largely rural country, with only about 30 percent of its population living in cities. But its cities are booming as millions of young people flee the countryside seeking jobs. The population of Lagos, for instance, reached a million by the mid-1970s and is several times that size now Lagos also provides a good picture of the twin realities of urban life in many third world countries. Miles of shanty towns surround a central city of wide boulevards and gleaming skyscrapers that remind one of New York or London. But for most urban Nigerians, the shantytown is their reality. Houses without running water, electricity, or sewers. Dead-end jobs if they have jobs at all. Endless traffic jams. Conflict with members of other ethnic groups.

Also like most of Africa, Nigeria has to cope with population growth of monstrous proportions. During most of the 1980s it averaged a bit over 3 percent per year and has dipped just below that figure for most of the 1990s. Those statistics mean that 45 percent of the Nigerian population is under fifteen, while only 3 percent is over sixty-five. At an average growth rate of percent, the population will double every twenty-four years. By the middle of the twenty-first century, Nigeria could have over 300 million inhabitants, far more than the United States or the former Soviet Union and roughly equal to the total African population today. Such population pressures are likely to make Nigeria even poorer as it is forced to spread its already limited resources even further.

Similarly, the debt crisis has hit Nigeria. In 1991, its total debt to northern banks and governments was pegged at $30 billion more than its total annual GNP. In 1989, the government announced that it could not meet its debt obligations beyond the first quarter of the year, prompting negotiation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other institutions that reduced payments in the short run but actually led to a slight increase in the overall size of the debt.

Finally, of all the countries covered in *Comparative Politics*, Nigeria has the weakest position in the global economy despite being one of the leading oil producers. Much of the "modern" sector of the economy is controlled, if not owned, by foreign corporations such as Shell. Nigeria is largely dependent on the export of that single commodity whose price has fluctuated wildly and mostly downward since the 1970s. Perhaps most importantly of all today, the Nigerian government cannot make many major economic decisions without first consulting the World
Bank, IMF and other northern financial institutions. Those bodies, in turn, put the initial pressures on the Babangida government to adopt the **structural adjustment** policies will consider in the policy section of this chapter.

**Ethnicity**

Ethnic differences and the conflict they engender plague many countries, especially in the third world. In Nigeria, no other political force comes close to it in importance.

In all, Nigeria has about four hundred ethnic groups, each with its own language and customs. Politically, the three largest ones matter most.

The largest of these are the **Hausa-Fulani**, who live in the north and are mostly orthodox Muslims. The Fulani who had some Northern African or even Arabian roots had gradually moved into the north and beginning in 1804 launched a holy war (jihad) gaining control of the region and its predominantly Hausa-speaking population. Since then, the two have intermarried to the point that they are virtually indistinguishable. The region to the west of the Niger and Benue rivers is dominated by the **Yoruba**, that on the east by the **Igbo** (sometimes called the Ibo by American analysts). Unlike the Hausa-Fulani, many Yoruba and Igbo have converted to Christianity.

Together, the three account for between 60 percent and 65 percent of the country as a whole, have produced most of its leading politicians, and served as the basis for all the political parties during the independence struggle and the three republics. About half the country is Muslim and 40 percent Christian. The rest of the population practices religions that antedate the arrival of the Arabs and Europeans.

In the center of the country lies the middle belt in which there is no single dominant ethnic group or religion. As a result, that region has been spared some of the worst aspects of ethnic politics and has produced some of its most nationally oriented leaders. In an attempt to create a symbol of national unity, during the 1980s the government moved the capital from Lagos in the heart of Yoruba territory to a new city in the middle belt, Abuja.

Inter-ethnic difficulties begin with the seemingly simple question of the way people communicate with each other. In the rather homogeneous rural areas, almost everyone still uses the group's traditional language. The elite usually speaks English, which is the official language of the national government. In the cities where poorly educated people from different groups have to communicate with each other, a new language has emerged that combines simple English terms and African grammatical structures. *Washington Post* correspondent Blaine Harden provides the following example from a political rap song about corrupt politicians: "If him bring you money, take am and chop. Make you no vote for am." If he tries to buy your vote, take the money and buy food. Then vote for somebody else.
As we will see in the rest of the chapter, Nigeria's ethnic problems go far beyond the trouble people have in communicating with each other. More than anything else, they structure life in the country: where people live, what they believe in, how they conduct their lives, how jobs are allocated, and whom they support politically. And, more than any other factor, ethnicity has made democratic government difficult and led to the coups of 1966, 1983, 1993, countless riots, and the civil war of 1967-1970.

High Stakes Politics

Nigeria thus deserves our attention for at least two reasons, one explicit and the other implicit in what you have seen so far. Because of its size, resources, and problems, Nigeria is important in its own right. Nigeria also merits inclusion in an introductory course in comparative politics because it is typical of the plight of sub-Saharan Africa in many ways. Continent-wide, the population growth rate is about 3 percent.

Only three sub-Saharan countries have avoided military or other forms of authoritarian rule. All have diverse populations, have experienced ethnic strife, and have had a hard time building the national unity many political scientists believe is required for democratization, stability, or legitimacy. In short, studying Nigeria means tackling an all-too-common example of one of the most tragic political stories in the world today.

All these problems have turned politics in Nigeria into a very high-stakes game. More people have been killed by repressive regimes elsewhere. Nonetheless, Nigeria’s politics is highly charged because people have great and growing expectations about what their government could and should do, expectations that leaders are rarely able to meet.

In Chapter 5, we saw that Third and Fourth Republic France suffered from an interconnected syndrome that left it unable to effectively meet the domestic and international challenges the country faced. Similarly, at least until the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria seemed locked in a deteriorating spiral of social, economic, and political difficulties that, at best, reinforce and, at worst, feed off each other.

The most obvious manifestation of Nigeria's ills is the alternation between civilian and military governments, neither of which have been able to make much headway on any front. Whatever institutional forms it takes, Nigerian politics is a struggle in which all the key groups desperately want to win or, at the very least, keep their adversaries from winning. The spoils of office are high, as the rampant corruption attests.

The uncertainties of Nigerian political life also make Nigeria harder to study than most of the other countries covered in this book. Because of the shifts back and forth between civilian and military rule, Nigeria has very few established institutions to structure political life, whoever is in power. As a result, the sections on state structures or parties will be shorter than those in other chapters, simply because there has been so little continuity in any part of Nigerian politics. On the other hand, this section that uses the history of that alternation to illustrate the rising stakes of Nigeria's politics has to be relatively long, because without understanding those twists and turns you will not be able to make sense of the weakness of its institutions.
**The Evolution of the Nigerian State**

The Origins of the Nigerian State

Critics are quick to point to the flaws and corruption of Nigeria's post-independence leaders in assessing the country's problems. To a large extent they are right, since leaders of all political stripes have made damaging mistakes, many of which seem in retrospect to have been easily avoidable. However, the incompetence and/or venality of these men is by no means the entire story. Whatever the leaders of independent Nigeria had been like, they would have faced a tremendous load of issues inherited from colonial times. In that history, three trends have played an important role in the shaping of modern Nigeria and continue to trouble it today:

- The slave trade cost the Nigerians and their fellow African: countless millions of people from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.

- Later, colonization disrupted traditional social and political systems and created new ones essentially along European lines that did not take root very well. Moreover, the very drawing of the boundaries as well as the nature of colonial administration made ethnic conflict all but inevitable after independence.

- The anti-colonial struggle, the political arrangements made at the time the former colonies became independent states, and the largely informal pattern of neocolonial relations that were established afterward left the new state in a poor position to develop politically, socially, and economically.

**Before the British**

The conventional wisdom has it that pre-colonial Africa was primitive and lacked any kind of meaningful civilization or government. In fact, it was anything but primitive.

There were a number of rather advanced civilizations in the area that is today's Nigeria. None had a written language, but other than that, they had well-developed political, cultural, and economic systems.

Hausa-speaking peoples can be traced back more than a thousand years in what is now northern Nigeria. By the thirteenth century, many had converted to Islam, although their practice was infused with traditional beliefs. They were part of an elaborate trading network that extended at least as far as Baghdad. When the British arrived, they found extensive mines, manufacturing operations that made elaborate pots and over thirty types of cloth, and merchants who had established extensive financial and monetary systems.

As early as the thirteenth century, a king, or mai, had been able to consolidate his rule over a wide region, bringing together dozens of Hausa states. Although the regime's power ebbed and flowed over the centuries, it had well-developed bureaucratic, judicial, and imperial institutions.
Political control was further centralized in the early nineteenth century when Usman Dan Fodio led a Fulani takeover of the northern region and established a caliphate under Islamic law (sharia) and transformed the old Hausa states into emirates.

The Yoruba developed a very different—but no less sophisticated political system. There, it seems that one man, Oduduwa, brought together the thirteen settlements of Ile-Ife and created the first Yoruba kingdom—and indeed, the first real sense of being Yoruba. Over the centuries, people spread out from Ile-Ife and established at least sixteen other kingdoms, all patterned along the lines of Oduduwa's. By the end of the eighteenth century, a huge kingdom covered what is now the Yoruba regions of Nigeria and virtually the entire country of Benin.

The Igbo east of the Niger had yet a different, but still elaborate, social and political system. Here, little attempt was made to forge centralized political units. Instead, individual villages were largely self-governing, though all used essentially the same practices. As Chinua Achebe so brilliantly describes it in Things Fall Apart, the Igbo had a widely accepted, if unwritten, constitution. There were clearly defined separate policy-making, administrative, judicial, and military roles. The society was based on households led by the man. Power and prestige went to those elders who had accumulated the most wealth, shown the most bravery in battle, and demonstrated the strongest commitment to the village's value system. In short, life among the Igbo was based more on merit and less on the accident of birth than it was for the British who colonized them as "primitive natives" late in the nineteenth century.

Outside influence in Nigerian life actually began before the Europeans arrived in the late fifteenth century. The spread of both the Sahara Desert and Islam brought at least the northern part of present-day Nigeria into contact with the Arab world around the beginnings of this millennium when it, not Europe, was the center of world civilization.

The Portuguese began European influence on Nigeria in the late fifteenth century when its explorers landed on the coast and its merchants started exchanging gold for slaves. In fact, the Ijo people who lived in the Niger River delta were the first to participate in the slave trade by selling the Portuguese some of the people they had captured in warfare or purchased as part of their existing trading networks with groups who lived further inland.

The slave trade only began having a significant impact during the seventeenth century when huge sugar plantations were established on the Caribbean Islands for which labor had to be imported. At that point, British, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Swedish "merchants" joined the Portuguese, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, the booming slave trade was centered along what is now the Nigerian coast. The Europeans did not establish many permanent settlements there at that time. African rulers were too strong and malaria and other diseases too deadly. Instead, they traded with African merchants, who were rich and powerful enough to kidnap, purchase, or otherwise obtain millions of their fellow Africans. In exchange, the merchants obtained textiles, firearms, liquor, iron, salt, and tools. Without them, the Europeans could not have sustained such a massive and continuous flow of human beings.

A minimum of 200,000 slaves a year were sent westward from 1827 to 1834 from one port alone, the Bight of Bonny. No one knows for sure how many people were enslaved before
slavery was finally ended in Brazil in the 1880s, but the most reliable estimates range between eleven million and twenty million. Of those, upwards of a million were Nigerian. But, the cost of slavery cannot be measured simply in numbers of people alone. As the Nigerian historian Richard Olaniyan has put it:

In assessing the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on the Nigerian societies, it is strongly tempting to think largely of the quantifiable, tangible costs--the number of prime-age individuals forcibly removed, for example--leaving aside the intangible social, psychological and political effects. Both the victims and the beneficiaries of the nefarious traffic suffered from it; as Professor Ryder holds, "on those who lived by it as well as those who suffered it the slave trade wrought havoc and debasement."

At that historical moment when new discoveries sparked by human initiative and curiosity were propelling European civilization forward, African development was being stunted as generations of its best and brightest youth were ripped out of society and sold into slavery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<td>1884-5</td>
<td>Berlin Conference on Africa</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Unification of Nigeria as a single colony</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>Creation of National Congress of British West Africa</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td>Creation of Nigerian National Democratic Party</td>
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<td>1938</td>
<td>Nigerian Youth Charter issued</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Nigerianization of civil service begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951 and 1954</td>
<td>Interim constitutions go into effect</td>
</tr>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>Independence</td>
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</table>
Colonization

During the nineteenth century, the slave trade wound down after its elimination in the British Empire in 1833 and the United States after the Civil War. That did not mean that European involvement in Africa came to an end. Quite the contrary.

The industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism in general led Britain and the other European powers to seek new supplies of raw materials and markets for finished goods abroad. In Nigeria, the most important product now traded was palm oil, which was used to lubricate the machines in the new British factories. Between 1814 and 1834, annual sales of palm oil grew from 450 to 14,000 tons per year.

The end of the slave trade and the new relationships elicited more resistance from African traders and rulers, leading the British to establish a permanent colony at Lagos and a base at Lokoja where the Niger and Benue rivers come together. A more permanent European presence was also made easier when it was discovered that quinine cured malaria. Still, there was little thought of colonizing all of Nigeria or the rest of Africa. Instead, in 1865, a British parliamentary commission went so far as to advocate phasing out all British activity along the Nigerian coast!

The European geopolitical situation was to change all that. The 1870s were a tumultuous time in Europe. The newly unified Germany and Italy disrupted the balance of power that had been so delicately carved out after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Those pent up pressures had to be released somewhere, and that somewhere turned out to be Africa, setting off what is commonly known as the scramble for Africa.

Explorers and soldiers spread all over the continent staking claims to territories for their government back in Europe. Often, representatives of two or more countries claimed the same territory.

Finally, the German government convened the International Berlin West Africa Conference, which lasted from November 1884 to February 1885. For all intents and purposes, the Berlin Conference merely developed mechanisms to regulate the carving up of Africa that was already well under way.

There was more than the pursuit of national glory or balance of power politics involved in the colonization of Africa. The industrialists and merchants spawned by the industrial revolution were seeking markets abroad in order to keep expanding their businesses. Moreover, to protect their industries, the European powers erected stiff tariff harriers and sought colonial markets abroad in which they would have the exclusive right to sell manufactured goods.

Missionaries were appalled by the values and customs the explorers and traders talked about after their return home from Africa. The new sense of nationalism combined with the Europeans' moral certainty to create an unfortunate arrogance and ignorance. The Europeans failed to even notice that there were well-developed-albeit very different-civilizations all over the continent, prompting religious and educational leaders to try to convert the "heathens."
The British conquest of Nigeria was conducted from its existing enclaves in Lagos and elsewhere. They launched a series of pacification campaigns designed to destroy the power of local leaders and, in the process, undermined popular belief in the various indigenous cultures. Though vastly outnumbered, the British were aided by their technical superiority and by the divisions among the Africans that made any kind of unified resistance impossible. Thus, the British manipulated warfare taking place among the Yoruba to take over the western region and establish a protectorate in Ibadan in 1893.

The British also used economic pretexts to justify their activities. In 1885, they fabricated a charge of obstructing free trade against Jaja of Opobo, a local merchant and strongman. Jaja was arrested, paving the way for British occupation of the territory previously under his control. By 1902, the British had effectively taken control of what is now eastern and western Nigeria. The British also took over the north during that same time period. Here, the central character was an adventurer and trader, Sir George Goldie. At the age of thirty, Goldie first visited the north, realized that there was too much competition among the British traders already operating there, and brought them all together into the United African Company (UAC). Goldie also was a fierce nationalist who feared that other countries, especially France, had designs on the north. In short, Goldie realized that British trade and political control had to go hand in hand. His quest for "gold" and "glory" led him to convince the Foreign Office to appoint him chief agent and vice-consul of the Niger, which allowed him to offer British military protection on behalf of the UAC.

By the time of the Berlin Conference, Goldie had negotiated more than two hundred treaties, which the British government used as the basis for its claim to the north. In 1886, he proclaimed a government for the region.

In reality, British rule was anything but secure, especially away from the towns and rivers. Over the next fifteen years, they overcame stiff if sporadic resistance and gradually extended their control over more and more of the region. Finally, in 1906, British forces destroyed the remnants of the Fulani empire and established total British authority in the north. Eight years later the British combined the north with the south and east to create the single entity that then came to be called Nigeria. This was not even an African term, but one coined by the British. It was, in short, an artificial name to describe an artificial entity that had nothing in common with traditional regional alignments.

In the Nigerian case, the cultural, economic, and political disruption caused by colonialism probably went a lot further than in either India or Iraq. No one has expressed that impact any better than Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*. Most of us would not want to have lived in traditional Igbo society. Women were truly second-class citizens. Twins are killed. But it was also a society with its own culture and values in which people led lives of dignity as portrayed in the successes and failures of Okonkwo the novel's protagonist and one of the village leaders. Toward the end of the book, British missionaries arrive and try to convert the people of Okonkwo's village. They start with its weakest links, including one of Okonkwo’s children who cannot or will not live up to the culture’s demand that men must prove themselves as warriors. The first missionary is relatively kind, but soon he is replaced by a less tolerant and less patient colleague who tries to impose Christianity on the village in a far less tactful manner. Seeing his way of life slipping away, Okonkwo ultimately kills the minister, knowing full well that his act will bring soldiers in.
Knowing, too, that not only his life, but the traditional life of his people, are about to be destroyed, Okonkwo kills himself in a final act of desperation. The novel ends with a British soldier writing his memoirs, tentatively entitled "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."

Colonial Rule

In comparative terms, British rule was relatively benign, especially in colonies like Nigeria where there were very few European settlers. Nonetheless, colonization had a devastating impact. As Basil Davidson put it:

All the systems, in essential ways, operated with the same assumptions and for the same purposes. Each of them was racist and exploitative. They used colonial power to treat Africans as inferior to Europeans, justifying this by a whole range of myths about a supposed "white superiority." The purpose of using colonial power in this way was to make Africans serve the interests of European colony-owners.

In 1914, the British created a single Nigerian colony but administered the north and south separately until the very end of the colonial period. Thus began the often-conscious practice of deepening already existing divisions, thereby magnifying the problems the Africans would have to deal with once the country gained its independence. As one expert put it, "if the British 'created' Nigeria, British colonial policy largely contributed to its remaining a mere geographical expression."

In the north, the British relied purely on a system of indirect rule in which local leaders continued to rule subject only to the limited supervision of imperial agents. In the south, they established a traditional colonial regime in which expatriate British officials governed directly. Even there, the British had to depend on local officials since they were so vastly outnumbered. As late as 1938, there were no more than 1,500 officials in the entire colony.

Frederick Lugard, the first British governor of northern Nigeria (1900-1906), referred to Britain’s dual mandate. On the one hand, colonial administrators had to serve the interests of imperialists and industrialists back home. On the other hand, it had to promote member of the "native races" who sought to improve the lot of their paper (of course in ways determined by the British). The British chose to rule through traditional local leaders, the "kings" and "emirs" of the north and "chiefs" of the south. But, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that these local leaders had no role in determining colonial policies which were set by White men in London and Lagos.

There was one area in which colonial rule did benefit Nigerian society: education. Missionaries opened schools that were supported by grants from the British government. By 1926, there were about 4,000 elementary and 18 secondary schools. Of those, however, only 125 of the elementary and none of the secondary schools were in the north. In 1934, the first "higher college" that concentrated on technical education was opened, followed by the first university in Ibadan in 1948.
Only a tiny fraction of the colonial population was able to attend even the elementary school. Nonetheless, the establishment of this rudimentary system had two important and unintended side effects that were to hasten independence. First, it created a new elite separate from the traditional authorities through which the British governed that was not easily integrated into the colonial system and would form the core of the independence movement from the 1930s on. Second, the growing number of literate Nigerians made it possible for an active and often critical press to begin operations.

Economically, the picture was decidedly less positive. The British assumed from the beginning that their colonies should pay for themselves and, preferably, turn a profit while aiding industrial development at home. That was not possible given the economic systems the British inherited with the consolidation of colonial rule.

Therefore, as in India, they embarked on a series of changes that "undeveloped" Nigeria. Up to that point, Nigeria produced enough food to feed all its people and had the systems of trade and manufacturing noted earlier.

The British destroyed almost all of that. They introduced cash crops that could be exported to help cover the costs of administering the colony. Each region specialized in a different crop: palm oil in the east, cocoa in the west, and peanuts in the north. As a result, Nigerian agriculture no longer produced enough for local consumption, and the colony had to begin importing food.

Moreover, the Royal Niger Company (a later incarnation of the UAC) gained a monopoly on trade and the profit that accrued from it. Similarly, the British seized the tin mines in the Jos plateau that Nigerians had worked for more than two thousand years. The British expanded the mining operations, introduced modern machinery, and by 1928 were employing upwards of forty thousand Nigerians, but now the Nigerians were poorly paid wage laborers, not independent producers. Taxes and customs duties were imposed on essential goods imported into the colony. All in all, economic policy made Nigeria dependent on Great Britain and at the same time heightened the regional differences within the colony. As that happened, people began to consciously define themselves as Yoruba or Igbo or northerners. That sense of self-identification was especially pronounced in the north where development lagged, and more and more people began to fear becoming permanently poorer than southerners who were also more fully integrated into British culture and administration.

Independence

However powerful and destructive it may have been, British colonialism began sowing the seeds of its own destruction virtually from the beginning in Nigeria as it had in India. The British may have conquered Nigeria, but they could not forever keep it in submission. If nothing else, there were too few British and too many Nigerians. The British had to educate Nigerians to help run and develop the colony. Moreover, the British "civilizing" mission also led Nigerians not just to read and write and pray to the Christian God, but to learn about what the British claimed to be their values, including freedom and democracy.
From the moment the unified colony of Nigeria was created, a series of events began to unfold that would lead to independence barely a half century later. The beginning of the drive toward independence came with World War I. The British imposed heavy taxes on Nigeria and the other African colonies to help pay for the war. Meanwhile, arguing for the need for enhanced national security, the British took over even more intra- and inter-colonial trade. Some Nigerians were drafted into the British army, where they served primarily as porters. The war and the reasons the British gave for fighting it do not seem to have had much of an impact on the Africans who served in the army. On the other hand, they did help a few members of that still tiny educated elite see the contradiction between the colonizers' democratic principles and the harsh realities of their colonial rule.

Meanwhile, the vastly outnumbered British found they had to rely on Africans more and more in governing Nigeria and the other colonies. No Africans occupied decision-making positions during the interwar period. Nonetheless, the colonial rulers had to employ thousands of interpreters, clerks, and police officers as well as the chiefs through whom they continued the system of indirect rule.

Colonial rule in the 1920s had an unintended side effect that did neither the British nor the Nigerians much good in the long run. As noted earlier, the British were convinced that Africans lived in tribes, though they did not have much of an idea of what that actually meant. That belief led the British to assume that indirect rule should be conducted through tribal chiefs and that if a chief did not exist, they had to create one. Gradually, the practice worked. Chiefs began to consolidate their authority over communities that came to see themselves as unified peoples.

In short, the British created tribes where no such organization had existed before. With time, those "tribes" became vehicles Africans could use to see and defend their common interests and, ultimately, the parties that were to steer the path to independence and the tumultuous politics afterward.

At about this time, organized opposition to colonial rule appeared. In the first years of this century, the American Marcus Garvey and others created a pan-African movement designed to bring Africans and African-Americans together to work for common goals, including independence for the colonies.

During the 1920s, pan-Africanism gradually gave way to the idea of a West African and then to Nigerian nationalism. In 1920, a National Congress of Black West Africa (NCBWA) was formed by representatives from all the British colonies in the region. As with the other early African efforts, the NCBWA advocated limited reforms, such as the granting of some African representation in the colonial assemblies the British had created by then.

At about the same time, the first purely Nigerian political movement emerged with the formation in 1923 of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) by Herbert Macaulay who is frequently seen as the founder of Nigerian nationalism. For the most part, the NNDP and groups like it gained their support from the still small group of Western-educated lawyers, teachers, and merchants in Lagos. Only a few members of the old elite like Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna
(ruler) of Sokoto, supported these movements and thus helped build bridges between the new and traditional elites.

Although Macauley took a more militant line than earlier opponents of colonial rule, his movement stopped short of demanding independence. During the 1930s, support for Nigerian political groups began to broaden with the formation of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). Now critics went beyond attacking specific colonial policies such as the educational system that did not provide Africans with the skills that would allow them to become leaders and began talking about a united and free Nigeria.

In 1938, the NYM issued the Nigerian Youth Charter, which was the first actual call for self-government. The document was largely ignored by the British, but it heartened and radicalized the educated elite, which now included a growing number of young people living outside of Lagos. Perceptive British observers also realized that irreversible changes were occurring in Nigeria and many other colonies that, sooner or later, would lead to the end of colonial rule.

Dissatisfaction grew inside and outside of the intellectual community during the depression. Colonial rule had made Nigerians dependent on international markets. That was tolerable as long as the outside world was buying Nigerian goods and paying reasonable prices for them. But after the October 1929 stock market crash in New York, the demand for colonial goods evaporated. That left not just the Nigerian elite but Nigerian workers more painfully aware of what colonial rule was costing them. Nigerians paid nearly £1 million in taxes in 1934, but only about a quarter of the colonial budget went to social service, educational, or economic programs that would benefit Africans.

World War II probably made independence inevitable. This time, around one hundred thousand Nigerians served in the British army, and many actually saw combat. Unlike their parents in 1914, these soldiers returned with a heightened desire for independence, democracy, and equality—all those things they supposedly had been fighting for. Now, support for change was not just limited to the elite but included the thousands who had been mobilized for the war effort and the people they had come into contact with.

For Africans, the war that had begun as an antifascist struggle became an anti-colonial and antiracist one as well. In 1944, Macauley and Nnamdi Azikiwe formed the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, which went beyond the small steps advocated by earlier nationalists and demanded independence. As Azikiwe, who was to become the most important nationalist leader during the next generation, put it:

We who live in this blessed country know that until we are in control of political power, we would continued to be the footstool of imperialist nations. We are fed up with being governed as a crown colony. We are nauseated by the existence of an untrammeled bureaucracy which is a challenge to our manhood.

Meanwhile, the social changes that had begun before the war continued at an ever more rapid rate. The closure of many European and American markets disrupted rural life and deepened poverty in the countryside. The cities filled with un- and underemployed (and thus dissatisfied)
young men. Hundreds of new schools and a few universities were opened. Trade unions were formed. All were to become fertile ground for nationalist organizers over the next fifteen years.

Events outside Nigeria also hastened independence. In 1941, American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter, which declared that the Allies would "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live" after the war. Shortly after the war, Britain granted a number of Asian colonies, including India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) their independence. Those landmark events gave the Nigerians new hope for their own future, especially because, as they pointed out, Nigeria was more developed than Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the war had weakened the British, leading many Labour and Conservative politicians to the conclusion that they could no longer afford their colonies. In 1946, the new Labour government committed itself to reforms that would give colonies like Nigeria "responsible government" without either defining what that meant or establishing any kind of timetable for the transition to self-government.

Not surprisingly, Nigerians joined their fellow Africans in stepping up the pressure for independence sooner rather than later. Everywhere on the continent, nationalist movements garnered new support and radicalized their demands. Nigerian leaders raised the stakes, demanding meaningful political power immediately and independence in the not very distant future. More importantly, they recognized that if they were to build a mass movement that would truly extend beyond the urban intellectuals, it would be easiest to do so on a regional level. Regional parties were formed to replace the prewar organizations that had been so narrowly based in the Lagos intellectual community.

Nationalist leaders also were able to gather support among the "old boy" networks of school graduates and the ethnic associations that emerged, among the new urban migrants. Nationalist politicians also used a relatively free press to publicize their attacks on British policy and to claim that they would do a better job if they were in charge of an independent Nigeria.

The British did not reject the claims out of hand. As early as 1946, They began the transition to self-government by promulgating the Richards Constitution (named for the colonial governor at the time), which established elected assemblies in each region. In 1948, the British started the "Nigerianisation" of the civil service. By the early 1950s, the British had decided that they were going to have to speed up the move toward self-government if not grant out-right independence. That led to the MacPherson (1951) and the Lyttleton (1954) constitutions, which allowed each region to elect its own representatives and draft its own laws, gave them equal representation in the national legislature, and established a federal structure in which the national government shared power with the three regions.

Elsewhere, the drive toward freedom was moving even faster, culminating in Ghana's (formerly the Gold Coast) becoming sub-Saharan Africa's first independent state in 1957. Throughout this period, representatives of the British government and all the major Nigerian forces met in a series of sessions in London and Lagos to determine further constitutional reforms. By that time, electoral politics had already taken on a decidedly regional and ethnic tone. The National Council of Nigeria and the CameroonS (NCNC) organized the Igbo (including some in the
neighboring French colony of the Cameroons). The relatively conservative **Northern People's Congress (NPC)** and more radical **Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU)** did well among the Hausa-Fulani. The **Action Group (AG)** dominated among the Yoruba, while the **United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC)** organized the various groups in the center of the country.

A federal election under universal suffrage (except for women in the Muslim north) was held in 1959. Final provisions for independence called for representation to be determined on the basis of population, which was to work to the benefit of the north that then accounted for about 40 percent to 45 percent of the total population. Nigeria finally became an independent country within the British Commonwealth of Nations on 1 October 1960 with Tafawa Balewa as prime minister and Azikiwe as governor-general and then the symbolic president when Nigeria declared itself a republic three years later.

But as independence neared, two of the problems that were to plague the new country emerged as well. In their desire to spur development and to gain the support of voters, politicians began dispensing "favors," the first step toward the corruption that no Nigerian regime has yet been able to overcome. Similarly, the evolution of shared power within a largely regional framework intensified the already serious ethnic differences. Until it became clear that Nigeria was going to become independent, its people had a common enemy—the British. But once independence seemed assured, their internal differences began taking center stage, and by the time independence formally came, Nigeria was united in name only.

*Since Independence*

In most other chapters in *Comparative Politics*, the section on the evolution of the state ended with events that occurred years ago. That is not true of countries that are in the midst of major transitions from one regime to another. That is, of course, the case with Nigeria whose newest republic was created only a few weeks before these lines were written.

**The First Republic**

Like most former British colonies, Nigeria started out with a standard parliamentary system. It had a bicameral Parliament, but only the lower chamber, the House of Representatives, was directly elected and had any real power. Executive authority was vested in a cabinet and prime minister drawn from the ranks of the majority party in Parliament. The government remained in office until its five-year term ended as long as it maintained the support or confidence of that majority (see Table 2). There also was a ceremonial but powerless head of state, the governor-general until 1963 and the president thereafter.

The new Nigerian system only differed from classical parliamentary arrangements in one significant way. It was a federal system in which the national government shared power with three (later four) regional ones that roughly coincided with the territories in which the leading ethnic groups lived. These governments, too, were structured along classical parliamentary lines. The creation of a federal system marked the early recognition that this highly diverse country
could not be governed exclusively from the center without fanning ethnic tensions that long antedated the arrival of the British in the nineteenth century.

### Table 2

Nigerian Regimes Since Independence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Head of State</th>
<th>Type of Regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-1966</td>
<td>Tafawa Balewa</td>
<td>Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>J. T. U. Aguiyu Ironsi</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1975</td>
<td>Yakubu Gowon</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1976</td>
<td>Murtala Muhammed</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1979</td>
<td>Olusegun Obasanjo</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-1983</td>
<td>Shehu Shagari</td>
<td>Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1985</td>
<td>Muhammadu Buhari</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1993</td>
<td>Ibrahim Babangida</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Ernest Shonekan</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-1998</td>
<td>Sani Abacha</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>Abdulsalmi Abubakar</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-</td>
<td>Olusegun Obasanjo</td>
<td>Republic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In retrospect, it is easy to see why that type of system did not work. In parliamentary regimes, politics is usually adversarial, pitting an essentially unified majority against an equally united opposition. It "works" in a country like Great Britain because everyone accepts the rules of the game and there are few major ideological differences between government and opposition. The opposition accepts the fact that it is not going to have much influence on the shaping of legislation and that its main role is to criticize the government as vociferously as possible as part of its attempt to turn the tables at the next election.

In Nigeria, those conditions were not met by any stretch of the imagination. Early public opinion polls showed considerable hope for the new regime. Subsequent events, however, showed that whatever legitimacy the regime started with evaporated quickly. And, as that happened, so did the capacity of the state to accomplish much of anything.

Instead, political life turned into a vicious circle. Politicians were convinced that every contest was a **zero-sum game** in which the likely costs of losing were catastrophic. The government feared losing to the opposition would entail far more than simply spending a few years out of office. The opposition, in turn, resented its powerlessness and grew ever more convinced that the incumbents would do everything possible to stay in control. The one thing they both did well
was conduct the passionate debate common to all parliamentary systems. But, in this case, all the debate did was magnify already serious differences and raise the stakes even more.

As we saw above, it was clear that partisan politics was going to have a strong ethnic base. The main parties produced the four main leaders of those years—Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC), Obafemi Awolowo (AG), Aminu Kano (NEPU), and Sir Ahmadu Bello (NPC). Although they all tried to gain support throughout the nation, they had next to no success beyond their own ethnic community (the very confusing material on parties and elections in the first two republics is summarized in Tables 3, 4, and 5). Each scored major victories in its "home" region. The Muslim-based NPC came in way ahead of the other parties but fell nineteen seats short of an absolute majority and therefore had to form a coalition with the Igbo-based NCNC with which it had had a loose alliance during the election campaign. In other words, the first government of the new Nigeria represented some of its groups, but only some of them. From the beginning, democracy was on shaky ground. The only real political competition occurred in national elections. At the regional level, Nigeria was a collection of one-party fiefdoms where leaders bullied their opponents, which only served to heighten ethnic conflict and raise the stakes of national politics.

The new state had a lot of responsibility and a lot of resources to distribute, including the aid money that poured in after independence. Each faction sought to control the government so that it could distribute the lion's share of those resources to itself and its clients. Meanwhile, politicians began making choices about where they were going to operate. The most powerful northern politician, Sir Ahmadu Bello, chose to stay home and serve as premier of the northern region, while his deputy, Alhaji Sir Abubaker Tafawa Balewa, became prime minister of the federal government. Awolowo, the AG's leader, decided to lead the opposition in Lagos, leaving Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola to head the regional government in the west. Azikiwe left the east to become the governor-general and then president.

Only one thing united these politicians: the pursuit of power. Leading politicians became enthralled with the wealth, status, and privileges holding office produced.

To make matters even more complicated, while the north dominated politically, it lagged way behind economically. Traditional Islamic rulers and values remained important, which led to limited educational development (only 2.5 percent of northern children were attending school), the exclusion of women from civil and economic life, and something approaching the rejection of "modern" society. Nonetheless, the south feared and resented the north's political power.

The first crisis occurred in the west. Chief Awolowo had gradually moved to the left politically and, among other things, began criticizing the fancy lifestyles politicians were beginning to lead. In the process he threatened and alienated both the national government and the regional one headed by his colleague and now rival Chief Akintola. Awolowo provoked a confrontation within the AG that culminated in the regional assembly's vote of no confidence in the Akintola government on 25 May. Four days later, the federal government declared a state of emergency in the region. Akintola was returned to office, and Awolowo was arrested on trumped-up treason charges and sentenced to serve ten years in prison. The AG was irrevocably split.
This crisis demonstrated two problems that were to plague the first republics. It has proved all but impossible to limit conflict to a single issue on which politicians could find a compromise. Instead, each incident seemed like all-or-nothing propositions to those involved. Also, the willingness of the federal leadership to employ emergency rule and arrest Awolowo on the flimsiest of both constitutional or legal pretexts suggests that politicians of all stripes never accepted democratic procedures, especially tolerance of one's opponents.

Those same problems burst back onto the political scene shortly thereafter when the government began conducting a new census in 1963. In most countries, the census is not a deeply divisive issue, with controversy normally limited to technical debates about the best way to compensate for certain types of people who are least likely to be counted, like the homeless in the United States. In Nigeria, the census was a major political trauma because the results would determine how many parliamentary seats would be allocated to each region and how government revenues and outside development aid would be distributed. Because the regions had become more politically homogeneous, census results would go a long way toward determining who would control the national government as well.

Each region's leadership doctored the results. Preliminary results showed that the populations of the east and west grew by 72.2 percent and 69.5 percent respectively in the ten years since the last census was conducted. Demographers easily showed that such growth was impossible given the rate at which women can physically bear children. Meanwhile, the north reported a more or less accurate increase of 33.6 percent, which meant it would see some of its political power eroded. Therefore, northern officials mysteriously "found" 8.5 million people who had been left out of the initial census, which "restored" them to the same share of the population they had had before the count began. The government threw out these figures and tried again the next year. The results were no different.

But because the northern-dominated leadership ultimately decided to use the 1964 census "results" in allocating seats for that year's parliamentary elections, the census struggle solidified north v. south antagonisms.

The census debacle led directly to the next crisis over the parliamentary and regional elections of 1964 and 1965. On the surface, the party system seemed to be realigning into two broad coalitions. On the one hand, the losers in the earlier crisis--the NCNC and Awolowo's wing of the old AG--came together with some minor groups to form the slightly left of center United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). Meanwhile, the NPC allied with Akintola and others in the southern minority who themselves had created a slightly more conservative National Nigerian Democratic Party (NNDP).

In fact, the two were little more than collections of separate, ethnically based organizations, each of which was dominant in its own region. The politicians expressed all kinds of lofty goals during the campaign. In reality, the campaign was marked by fraud, intimidation, and outright violence, which made a mockery of the democratic process.

Even though a candidate only needed the support of two fellow citizens to get on the ballot, 61 seats in the north were uncontested as NPC operatives "convinced" their opponents to withdraw.
Violence was so widespread in the west that Premier Michael Okpara called the election "a colossal farce" and declared that it should be postponed. When it became clear that the election would go forward, he called on westerners to boycott it.

The election was delayed in 59 constituencies. Contests in many others were rigged to such a degree that district-by-district results were never published and would not have been believed had they been. In the end, the NPC-led coalition swept to victory, winning 198 of the 253 seats contested in a first round of voting. Although it did poorly in later elections to fill the other 59, it still had an overwhelming majority.

The results confirmed the regionalization of Nigerian politics. The NPC won 162 of 167 seats in the north and none anywhere else. All the NNDP victories were in the west, where it won 36 of 57 seats. The opposition carried every seat in the east, the new mid-western state, and in Lagos. President Azikiwe called on his adversary, Prime Minister Balewa, to form a new government that actually included a slightly more balanced cabinet than his earlier one. Still, attacks on the extravagant salaries and lavish lifestyles of the politicians continued. Many intellectuals started condemning the competitive party system itself, advocating the kind of nonparty or single-party regime that was being tried in much of Africa at the time.

Regional elections in the West proved to be the last straw. It was the one region in which there was some competition, essentially between the Akintola and Awolowo wings of the old AG. The campaign was so violent that the federal government banned all public gatherings and sent half the federal police into the region. When results came in, they showed an overwhelming NNDP (Akintola) victory, even though most experts thought the UPGA (Awolowo) had actually won. Akintola returned to power and turned on his opponents, ordering the assassination of two popular UPGA organizers. The UPGA, in turn, decided that it had no legal way to redress its grievances, and it, too, turned to violence including "wetting" its opponents: drenching them with gasoline and setting them on fire.

On the night of 14 January 1966, Akintola met with Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa in a desperate attempt to try to restore order. By morning, the military had intervened, overthrown the republic, and killed all three of them.

Military Rule I

What happened to Nigeria was, unfortunately, not all that uncommon. At one point or another, well over half of the sub-Saharan African countries have had military rulers, and almost all the rest have had some other type of authoritarian regime.

Nigeria's case was typical, too, in that the military had two reasons for intervening. The obvious one was the one they spoke about--the need to restore order. But, there were ethnic reasons as well, for the Nigerian military was by no means neutral in the ethno-partisan battle that had done in the republic.

Like everything else in Nigeria, the army had changed rapidly after independence. In 1960, 90 percent of the officers were British expatriates; by 1966, 90 percent were Africans. Most of the
officers, in other words, were young and had risen through the ranks very quickly. A disproportionate number of them, too, were Igbo and resented the way easterners had been treated.

After some initial confusion, Maj. Gen. J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo, took control of the new military regime. He moved quickly against corrupt officials and promised a rapid return to civilian rule. Ironsi also suppressed civil liberties and established a Supreme Military command (SMC) and Federal Executive Council (FEC) of leading civilian civil servants that were to govern the country for the next thirteen years.

On 24 May 1966, however, Ironsi made a terrible mistake. He announced plans for a new, centralized constitution. This confirmed northerners' worst fears that the coup had, in fact, been carried out to achieve Igbo control over the entire country. Hundreds of Igbos were killed in riots that broke out throughout the north.

In July, another set of officers staged a second coup that brought the thirty-two-year-old Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon to power. Gowon was chosen in part because he was a "compromise" ethnically—he was a northerner but a Christian.

Now, the task was not simply containing the conflict but maintaining the integrity of the new nation itself. One cannot overemphasize the fact that Nigeria was a new and artificial entity and that, therefore, there were few compelling reasons for any of its dissatisfied groups to feel any loyalty to it or even want to stay a part of it.

The first serious talk of secession came from the north, but the second coup ended that. The SMC divided the country into twelve states in an attempt to reduce the ethnic and regional polarization, but nothing Gowon and his supporters did could stem the anger and violence.

The eastern region's governor and military commander, Col. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, refused to recognize Gowon's government and demanded more autonomy for his region. More riots broke out. A million Igbo refugees hastily returned to the region, and Ojukwu ordered all non-easterners to leave the region.

The east then attempted to secede, creating the independent Republic of Biafra and plunging Nigeria into a bloody civil war. Over the next thirty months, hundreds of thousands of Nigerians died before federal troops finally put down the rebellion. By then, the size of the military had swollen to 250,000.

In sharp contrast with events of the preceding decade, Gowon and the SMC were generous in victory. Gowon announced that the military would remain in power another six years and then hand the government back to civilians. Moreover, oil revenues, especially after the price increases following the 1973-1974 OPEC embargo, left the government with unprecedented resources to use in smoothing the reintegration of the east. Nigeria began to cultivate its image as a continental leader, even entertaining some global pretensions, including the possibility of building its own atomic bomb.
By 1974, it had become clear that things were not going well. Many officers proved to be as corrupt and arrogant as the civilian politicians had been. In October, Gowon announced that the return to civilian rule would be delayed indefinitely. Ethnic tensions and political violence reappeared.

Finally, nine years to the day after he seized power, Gowon was overthrown in a bloodless coup and replaced by General Brigadier Murtala Muhammed and a group of fellow officers who claimed they were committed to reform. The first day he was in power, General Murtala removed the twelve state governors and quickly moved on to fire 10,000 government officials and 150 officers. On 1 October 1975, he took the most important step of all, outlining a four-year, step-by-step plan the restoration of democratic rule. Unfortunately, Murtala also incurred the wrath of many of his fellow officers, who assassinated him during a failed coup attempt on 13 February 1976.

He was replaced by Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, who continued preparations for the return to civilian rule. Over the next three years, Obasanjo was a model of integrity and made certain that the evolution of the new regime went smoothly. Press and other freedoms were extended, a new constitution was drafted, seven more states were created to help ease ethnic tensions, and a powerful Federal Election Commission (FEDECO) was established to remove the conduct of elections and the counting of ballots from the partisan process. In July 1978, civilians replaced military officers as governors of the now nineteen states. In 1979, Obasanjo gracefully gave up power.

The Second Republic

Like the Gaullists in France, Obasanjo and his colleagues set out to draft a constitution that they felt would give the country the best chance of avoiding a repeat of the catastrophic original regime. Parliamentary institutions were rejected in favor of a presidential system modeled quite closely on the United States.

At the heart of the Second Republic was a directly elected president who, it was hoped, would provide the country with a symbol of its unity. The president and vice-president would be eligible to serve two four-year terms. In a measure designed to break down the ethnic stranglehold on the parties, to get elected a candidate would need to win a majority of the vote and at least a quarter of the ballots cast in at least two-thirds of the states.

Table 3
Major Parties, Regions, and Leaders in the First and Second Republics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>First Republic Party</th>
<th>Second Republic Party</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>National Party</td>
<td>Ahmadu Bello,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The president would appoint a cabinet that would neither be drawn from nor be responsible to the Parliament but would be broadly representative of the population as a whole, though the constitution was quite vague about what that meant. The Parliament would have two houses with equal powers. The House of Representatives would have 449 members elected from single-member districts drawn up on a one-person-one-vote basis (although, of course, no census had been conducted to provide accurate population figures). There would also be a Senate with ninety-five members, five from each of the nineteen states.

The states would have a similar governmental structure. The only significant difference was that their legislatures were to be unicameral.

Parties had to be officially licensed by the Federal Election Commission, which was given unprecedented power to supervise election campaigns and generous resources to help fund them. All First Republic parties were banned. To be licensed, a new party had to demonstrate that it had a national and not just a regional organization.

Problems actually began before the new republic came into existence. The military government waited until September 1979 to lift its ban on partisan politics. That meant that political parties would only have three months to organize, establish national offices, and file the required papers with FEDECO.

Not surprisingly, only nineteen of the fifty or so potential parties were able to file papers, and of those, only five were finally licensed. Not surprisingly, too, four of the five were quite similar to First Republic parties, in large part because only the surviving politicians had well-established networks that would allow them to put together even the appearance of a national organization in so short a period. Thus, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) succeeded the NPC and was based largely in the north and led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a former First Republic minister. Chief Awolowo headed the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) whose Yoruba base of support coincided with that of his faction of the old AG. Dr. Azikiwe headed an Igbo-based replacement of the NCDC, the Nigerian People's Party (NPP). The Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) appealed to the same radical minority in the north as the old NEPU. Only the small Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP), itself the result of a schism within the NPP, had no clear First Republic roots. Each party tried to broaden its base of support and each had some success in doing so. Nonetheless, since they had so little time to prepare for the first elections, all the politicians found it easy to return to the rhetoric and style of First Republic days.
Five separate elections for state and federal offices were held in July and August 1979 (see Tables 4 and 5). Although there were quite a few charges of fraud and unfair campaign practices, the elections were conducted relatively freely and honestly. The NPN won 37.8 percent of the House and 37.4 percent of the Senate vote respectively. Its candidate, Shagari, won 33.8 percent of the presidential vote, 4.6 percentage points more than his chief rival, Chief Awolowo.

**Table 4**
Presidential Election Results in the Nigerian Second Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>% of the vote, 1979</th>
<th>% of the vote, 1983</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shagari, Shehu</td>
<td>NPN</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awolowo, Obafemi</td>
<td>UPN</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azikiwe, Nnamdi</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kano, Aminu</td>
<td>PRP</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yusuf, Hassan</td>
<td>PRP</td>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ibrahim, Waziri</td>
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<td>10.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braithwaite, Tunji</td>
<td>NAP</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Awolowo challenged the results, claiming that because Shagari had only won 25 percent of the vote in twelve of the nineteen states, he had not met the constitutional requirements for victory. FEDECO ruled that Shagari had won the 25 percent in twelve and two-thirds states, thereby giving him the minimum required. Awolowo and the UPN, and the ethnic tensions that plagued the first republic were rekindled before the second formally began.

The first serious conflict broke out in 1981 in the northern states of Kaduna and Kano, which had PRP governors but NPN-dominated legislatures. In Kaduna, the radical governor proceeded with his socialist-oriented policies only to be impeached by the more conservative legislature. In Kano, violence broke out between radicals and conservatives and quickly reached mid-1960s levels.

Popular disillusionment with the new regime spread quickly once it became clear that the politicians were not going to be any more honest this time. Ministers were accused of taking bribes. A governor was arrested for allegedly trying to smuggle millions of naira into his private British bank account. The national telecommunications center was burned down to keep evidence about fraud and mismanagement from being made public.

Meanwhile, world oil prices collapsed. Well over 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign earnings came from oil sales, so when its income dropped by nearly 60 percent from 1980 to 1983, the government found itself in desperate straits. The federal and state governments no longer had
enough money to pay civil service salaries or complete development projects. "Still," as Larry Diamond put it, "the politicians and contractors continued to bribe, steal, smuggle, and speculate, accumulating vast illicit fortunes and displaying them lavishly in stunning disregard for public sensitivities. By its third anniversary, disenchantment with the Second Republic was acute, overt, and remarkably broad-based."

The second set of elections were scheduled for 1983. All observers assumed that they would be a "make-it-or-break-it" event for the second republic. Unfortunately, the campaign proved even more violent and fraudulent than any of the earlier ones.

There was blatant manipulation of the voter registration lists, which showed an unbelievable 34 percent increase in the size of the electorate in just four years, most of which occurred in the north. Meanwhile, millions of names were missing altogether in the south and east.

Both Awolowo and Azikiwe insisted on running for president. Most observers expected that the thus-divided opposition would guarantee Shagari's reelection. But fearing the worst, the NPN passed out thousands of ballots that had already been filled out, bribed election officials, and refused to allow opposition poll watchers to do their jobs. When the votes were "counted," Shagari and the NPN had "won" a landslide victory. The official--and unbelievable-figures gave him nearly 48 percent of the presidential vote, an almost 50 percent improvement over his 1979 tally. Even more amazingly, not only did all the corrupt NPN incumbent governors win, but it won in six more states, giving it control of thirteen in all. And, despite all the evidence of growing dissatisfaction with the government and the NPN, it turned its slim plurality into a two-third" majority in the House of Representatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>House of Representatives</th>
<th>Senate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GNPP</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPN</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPN</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRP</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPP</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To no one's surprise, the military stepped in again on New Year's Eve 1983. Like its predecessor, the Second Republic was not to survive its second election.
Military Rule II

At first, the military coup was widely accepted as inevitable given the level of corruption. As a former army leader put it, "[d]emocracy had been in jeopardy for the past four years. It died with the election. The army only buried it."

This military regime led by Muhammadu Buhari was a lot like the first one. The Supreme Military Command was reconstituted. The military rulers cracked down, arresting hundreds of civil servants and politicians, including the president, vice-president, and numerous ministers and governors. Soldiers found vast quantities of cash in the homes and offices of those arrested, lending ever more credence to the rumors of corruption in high places.

Decree Number 2 gave the government broad powers to arrest anyone thought to be a security risk. The military interpreted this to mean anyone who criticized the regime. Decree Number 3 established military tribunals to try former politicians and government officials. Decree Number 4 banned any publication or broadcast that inaccurately criticized any government official or policy.

Support for the Buhari regime was not to last, however. Soon, it became clear that the regime was far less vigilant in prosecuting former NPN leaders than other politicians. Moreover, the economy continued to founder as the oil-induced crisis sent unemployment, inflation, and foreign debt skyrocketing. And, the government gave indications that it would not prepare a transition back to democracy.

Few were surprised when Buhari was, in turn, overthrown on 25 August 1985 in yet another coup, led by General Ibrahim Babangida who was the first general who actually took the title of president. In the first months, Babangida sent mixed messages. On the one hand, he immediately repealed Decree Number 4 and declared that his government "does not intend to lead a country where individuals are under the fear of expressing themselves." Journalists were released from jail, and the detention centers created to hold all those arrested under Buhari were opened for public inspection. On the other hand, Babangida continued the crackdown, banning serving politicians from public life for a decade. Police invaded Ahmadu Bello University, killing as many as twenty students. The security apparatus was widely believed to be responsible for the assassination of the editor of the weekly *Newswatch* who was generally considered to be the country's most outspoken journalist. Babangida renamed the SMC the **Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC)**, but in practice there was little difference between the two.

In 1986, however, the regime embarked in two new directions that made Babangida's rule seem much like Obasanjo's and which will be explored in more depth in the section on public policy below. First, the AFRC accepted a new economic policy of structural adjustment, including fiscal austerity and the support of market and other capitalist practices. Second, it announced a phased transition back to democracy to be completed by 1990.

The latter was greeted skeptically by critics who had come to doubt any general's commitment to civilian rule. Their skepticism only mounted as the government announced a series of delays in
its plans to hand over power. Nonetheless, the military plugged ahead with its reform effort, guiding a constituent assembly through the process of writing a constitution for a third republic in 1988.

The next year, it began rebuilding the political parties. All politicians who participated in the First and Second republics were banned from involvement in at least the first round of elections. Thirteen groups asked to be certified as political parties, but all were rejected. Instead, the government created two new ones, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), which were, in Babangida's own terms, "one a little to the left, and the other a little to the right of center."

Both parties settled on rich business leaders with close ties to the military regime as their candidates once presidential elections were finally scheduled for 1993. And, despite the regime's attempt to cast politics in national and economic terms, ethnicity remained on center stage. The NRC's candidate, Bashir Tofa—a Hausa-Fulani banker—assiduously chose Joe Nwodo—an Igbo Christian—as his vice-presidential running mate. The SDP, in turn, nominated Yoruba Chief Moshood Abiola, a well-known shipping magnate, publisher, and sponsor of soccer teams. Because he is a Muslim they thought Abiola might appeal in the north as well.

Neither candidate would have made an American campaign manager happy. Tofa was so unknown he did not even appear in Nigeria’s Who’s Who. His commitment to democracy was suspect, since he had publicly urged Babangida to stay in power until the turn of the century. Abiola was better-known in part because of Afro-Beat star Fela Kuti’s song about him and the publicity he received in 1992 for demanding that Britain and the other colonial powers pay reparations for the damage they did to Nigeria and the rest of Africa.

The election campaign had little of the violence that marred earlier campaigns and contributed to the collapse of the first two republics. But that is about the only positive thing that one can say about it. Only about 30 percent of population turned out to vote. Voting patterns once again broke along ethnic lines, as Abiola ran far better in the east and west and Tofa in his native north.

Unofficial results showed that Abiola had won easily with perhaps 55 percent of the vote. But even before the election occurred, a shadowy group close to Babangida, the Association for a Better Nigeria, called on the general to stay in power. As the results began coming in, the association went to court, citing rampant corruption in an attempt to get the publication of election returns postponed.

Finally, on 23 June, the military nullified the results of the elections. It issued a decree claiming "these steps were taken to save our judiciary from being ridiculed and politicized locally and internationally." Babangida insisted the military still intended to return the country to democratic and civilian rule in August, but it was hard to see how that could happen under the circumstances.

In July, tensions continued to mount. Abiola and his supporters went to court and took to the airwaves to defend what they clearly saw as a victory at the polls and to proclaim their boycott of any subsequent elections. More public protests, some of which turned violent, took place,
especially in Lagos, Abiola's base of support. On 26 August, Babangida decided to forgo another election and turned power over to a hand-picked civilian government, headed by Ernest Shonekan, the former chief executive officer of Nigeria's largest business conglomerate. Although Shonekan claimed otherwise, he was little more than a pawn for Babangida and/or the rest of the military.

This even half-hearted attempt at civilian rule was to last but eighty-three days. In November, the Supreme Court ruled that the Shonekan government had been put in office illegally. Within days, he was forced out of power by yet another military leader—Sani Abacha, who had been a coconspirator with Babangida in 1983 but had since become one his fiercest critics.

Abacha did appoint a number of civilians to his cabinet, including Abiola's running mate, a leading civil rights lawyer, and the editor of the largest independent newspaper. Nonetheless, Abacha’s rule turned out to be the most repressive and the most corrupt in Nigerian history.

In summer 1994, Abiola declared himself president in what one observer called the strongest challenge to central authority since the secession of Biafra in 1966. The government responded by arresting him and dozens of others. Abacha noted that "choosing the path of confrontation and subversion at this time of our national history will not be tolerated. Such acts will be sternly punished." Opposition within the country continued with a long series of strikes, concentrated in the petroleum industry located mostly in the southwestern part of the country where Abiola came from. The southwest is also the base of support for two new opposition groups, both loosely affiliated with the Abiola forces—the National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco) and the Campaign for Democracy.

The government cracked down harder than ever to keep its real and potential opposition cowed. In late summer 1995, Abacha purged the cabinet and fired the heads of the trade unions, the army and navy, and all the government institutions except for the elementary school system. More worrisome for most is the repression against dissidents, including the Nobel Prize-winning author Wole Soyinka who had his passport seized and was forced into exile. Other opponents like radical lawyer Gani Fawehinmi spent time in jail under a new law that allows the government to detain people without trial. Others detained included leaders of Nadeco and the Campaign for Democracy as well as former President Obasanjo.

In other respects, the military was losing its grip on power. It makes more sense, however, to defer dealing with more recent events until we discuss the prospects for democratization in the section on public policy below.

Political Culture and Participation in Nigeria

Any country’s political culture reflects the impact of its history on the way people think about politics and their society as a whole. In Nigeria’s case, the lack of unity and support for the regime and, at times, for the very existence of Nigeria have plagued it since the country gained its independence. What’s more, the actions of the elite since 1960 have undoubtedly left the country more alienated and polarized than it was forty years ago. That alienation and
polarization, in turn, are reflected in what average people do politically, thus adding yet another strain to an already overloaded system.

Mass Political Culture

As with most third world countries, there have been no systematic studies of Nigerian political culture even though most observers are convinced that it is one of the most important causes of its fluid, unstable politics. Therefore, all we can do here is outline the broad themes those observers point to.

First and most obviously, there is little that most Nigerians like about their political system. Things did not start that way. A few polls done in the early 1960s suggested that Nigerians had a greater sense of nationhood than did people in most of the third world. One 1962 survey found that only 16 percent of those sampled had trouble thinking of Nigeria in national terms. Similarly, three quarters of that same sample felt that Nigeria had "made progress" over the past five years and two-thirds thought it would continue to do so in the five years to come.

However, that early optimism did not turn into sustained support for any of the country’s regimes. If anything, Nigerians have grown more skeptical and cynical about politics and politicians.

Part of the problem is that Nigeria is one of the most fragmented countries in the world. As we have seen earlier, the division is largely along overlapping religious and ethnic lines. The more naive observers assumed that ethnic identification would give way to a national one soon after independence, not just in Nigeria but in the newly independent states in general. That has not been the case. If anything, ethnicity has become more not less, important.

The limited evidence available to us suggests that most Nigerians do in some way think of themselves as Nigerians. However, their ethnic identification matters more as a source of pride (e.g., we Igbo) and even more importantly as a source of dislike and division (e.g., you Yoruba).

The three largest groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) have virtually nothing in common politically, socially, or historically. The overwhelming majority of Nigerians only speak their "home" language, and if they learn another, it is invariably English and not one of the other indigenous tongues. The different groups live separately, either in their traditional regions or in ethnic enclaves in the few cities that are ethnically mixed.

Closely paralleling ethnicity is religion. Religion is nowhere near as important as ethnicity in most of the south, where, for instance, Yoruba Muslims tend to act politically as Yorubas more often than as Muslims.

In the north, however, it is hard to disentangle the impact of religion and ethnicity because so much of Hausa-Fulani culture is defined along Islamic lines. Traditional political and religious officials (who are often one and the same) have resisted attempts to "Westernize" the region, often with considerable success. Women have never voted in the north. Similarly, when the
federal government sent Igbo women census takers into the region in 1963, it touched off widespread protests. The northern desire to use a separate legal system based on *sharia* or Islamic law has held up the drafting of the constitutions of all three republics.

Finally, there is the region itself, which to some degree transcends both religion and ethnicity in even broader fears the north has about the south and vice versa. As we saw earlier, many northerners are afraid that southern (or modern) cultural values and economic practices will undermine their way of life. Southerners, by contrast, fear that a northern majority could seize power and leave them a permanent and aggrieved minority.

Nigeria is by no means the only country divided along these lines; Other countries are even more fragmented, and some, like the Netherlands, have a similar pattern of overlapping cleavages but have avoided the destructive controversies that ha plagued Nigerian politics.

The problem is that Nigeria is not just fragmented, it is polarized as well. Under the best of circumstances, it is hard for people to reach compromises about these kinds of issues to find a way, for instance, to use the *sharia* in some parts of a country but not in others without antagonizing people. In Nigeria, the politicians who have fanned the flames of ethnic, religious, and regional hatred also failed to address the country's real social and economic shortcomings. Therefore, it was just a matter of time until the violence that had been primarily orchestrated by the elites started breaking out spontaneously among an increasingly embittered public.

The importance of this alienation has been magnified by other aspects of Nigerian political culture, not the least of which has been the failure of class issues to take root. Most Nigerians live in abject poverty; in fact, poverty is one of the few things most Nigerians share. Moreover, the gap between rich and poor has grown dramatically, in particular as the corrupt political elite has siphoned off public funds to support its lavish life-style. Had economic issues become more important in defining basic values and assumptions about politics, Nigeria might have found itself in a better position. Reactions against that common poverty might have cut across ethnic, religious, and regional lines.

There also are sharp differences between rural and urban cultures. In the countryside, where about two-thirds of all Nigerians still live, many "traditional" structures and values remain strong. In particular, rural elites have found it relatively easy to turn the power the British handed them as emirs or chiefs into powerful patron-client relations (recall the oyabun-kobun relationships in Japan or the *jatis* in India).

In a 1988 study of politics in rural Nigeria, William Miles showed that the traditional distinction between nobles and commoners has been carried over into the politics of modern Nigeria. Virtually everyone seems to accept the hierarchical relationships in which clients defer to their patrons when it comes to politics or advice in general.

Moreover, most seem to reject such notions as "all men are created equal" or a world in which one's rank or status does not matter. To the degree that it is understood, democracy is sharply at odds with values that remain strong in most areas of rural Nigeria. One herder defined democracy this way in talking with Miles: "Men wander around like cattle, without any
direction. They make all kinds of excited noises, but there's no sense to it. Each goes his own way, lost, until there's no more herd."

In addition, it is in the countryside where illiteracy remains the highest. Not surprisingly, local studies have shown that most rural residents have at most a fuzzy idea of what national political processes and issues are all about. For instance, on the morning after the 1983 coup, Nigerian radio began playing western classical music, which residents in one typical village assume is military music because it is only played before the announcement of a coup or some other ominous event! When the announcement itself was made, it was done in English, which very few people in the countryside understand. Only two days later was it broadcast in Hausa. Perhaps because of their isolation, rural residents rarely get deeply involved in national politics on their own. Rather, they tend either to follow the initiatives of their local patrons or be swayed by the outsiders who appear during crises or election campaigns.

The booming cities are a different story altogether. There, observers find highly politicized people who seem willing to take a stand on almost any issue at almost any time. They also find large numbers of highly dissatisfied people, alienated from a government that cannot provide jobs or housing of health care.

That cynicism is not simply an urban phenomenon. The peasants Miles lived with were convinced that politicians are by their very nature dishonest and that it makes no sense whatsoever to trust them. And, since cultures change slowly under the best of circumstances, it seems unlikely that these values will erode any time soon, no matter what the Obasanjo government does.

**Elite Culture**

In every country, elites think and act differently from the mass public. In few places, however, are the differences as pronounced and as politically important as they are in Nigeria.

The political and economic elite has been what amounts to a bourgeois class if not quite in the way Marx anticipated. Its wealth stems from its control of the state. This has given rise to a category of political and bureaucratic officials popularly known as lootocrats who have used their positions for tremendous personal gain and who, like the European bourgeoisie Marx did write about, have been able to protect their wealth and power under civilian and military rule alike. In the high stakes game of Nigerian politics, defeat cut one out of the process in which wealth was accumulated and distributed.

Consequently, with but a few exceptions, those in Nigerian elite were willing to violate the rules of democratic game under the first two republics and overstep normal bounds of authority when the military was in power. They accurately saw that the electoral stakes were very high and demonstrated what Larry Diamond calls "a shallow disposition to tolerate opposition when they had the power to discourage and repress it." That greed and the willingness to subvert the democratic process that went along with it were shared by the elite as a whole and were not the province of any particular ethnic, religious, or regional group. On the other hand, the elites were
quick to use ethnic, religious, and regional appeals because those were the ones they could most effectively use to mobilize their largely rural clients.

Given this brief description of Nigerian mass and elite cultures, we can easily see three problems they pose for any country trying to sustain democratic rule. First, there is at most a limited and grudging sense of national identity or integration. The values that matter most to most people lead them to define who they are politically on the basis of where they stand on those sub-national, overlapping, and polarizing cleavages. Second, no Nigerian regime has enjoyed much legitimacy, without which, the theorists tell us, any kind of stable regime is impossible. Political scientists often point to the voluntary payment of taxes as a simple indicator of the degree to which a people find their regime legitimate. In 1979, FEDECO disqualified nearly forty nominated candidates for not having paid any taxes at all! Third, there is not much trust or tolerance of other individuals and groups across ethnic, religious, and regional boundaries. Moreover, most Nigerians do not hold their leaders in high regard, an attitude mirrored in reverse by those very same leaders.

That said, elite and mass cultures are different in one key respect. Elite cultures can change quickly for two reasons. First, a while new set of leaders can come to power. Second, because there are relatively few people involved, a group of incumbents can decide to change more easily and rapidly than a population as a whole.

And, there are some encouraging signs that one or both may happen under Obasanjo.

**Non-Electoral Participation**

If we looked at culture alone, it would be tempting to conclude that Nigeria is again a disastrous civil war or revolution waiting to happen. Neither seems imminent in Nigeria today, ironically, precisely because the long history of military rule has neither provided many outlets for protesting participation nor created widespread expectations that mass involvement of any sort can accomplish much. Thus, while there have been episodes of spontaneous, violent protest as recently as 1998, they have been few and far between in comparison with India or many other ethnically divided societies.

Students of democracy argue that it can thrive only if there are ample guarantees and opportunities for people to express themselves politically either as individuals or as part of groups. Here, Nigeria has a mixed record on at least two counts. First, civil liberties of all sorts have frequently been honored in the breach even under the first two republics. As we saw earlier, civilian politicians were all too willing to implement provisions for emergency rule and bully their opponents by denying them the effective right to vote or express their opinions. At times, especially under Babangida and Abacha, their opponents were arbitrarily arrested—or worse.

On the other hand, we should not confuse military rule in Nigeria with some of the extremely ruthless dictatorships the world has seen in this century, such as the one in Iraq today. During most periods of military rule, the press has remained reasonably free and has frequently
criticized governments and their policies. Many interest groups were allowed to remain in existence, though, as with the press, those critical of military rule itself were often suppressed.

Second, there are sharp differences between rural and urban Nigeria. If the anthropologists are to be believed, there is little ongoing political life in the countryside other than during election campaigns. There are times, however, when major protests break out in the countryside. Thus, as these lines were being written, activists from the Ijwa and Itsekeri peoples had been engaged in months of near-civil war over ethnic differences and access to the oil wealth of the Niger delta region.

The spontaneous and often violent protests that have wracked Nigeria have occurred primarily in the cities, especially in the former capital, Lagos. There they have often been dramatic and even violent. In the early 1990s, rioters burned cars, looted stores, and trashed government offices in Lagos to protest against the government’s acceptance of an IMF-imposed austerity program to be discussed in the policy section below. In urban areas, we also find a wide variety of groups representing doctors, lawyers, students, and more. Informal groups of business leaders or ethnic associations seem to be far more influential in large part because they can work more effectively within the patron-client networks that still largely dominate Nigerian politics.

There have also been a number of groups that have pushed for legal and constitutional reform, especially when military rule began to weaken. Thus, today’s People’s Democratic Party (PDP) is an outgrowth of the earlier People’s Democratic Movement which was founded by General Shehu Yar’Adua and other former officials who had been imprisoned under Babangida (Yar’Adua died in prison in 1996). Similarly, the 63 human rights organizations that made up the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) brought to light a number of violations of the electoral law during the 1999 legislative and presidential campaign.

Political Parties and Elections

Political parties and competitive elections are accorded a privileged place in analyses of democracy. On the one hand, their very existence is part of the definition of liberal democracy itself. On the other, how they operate in practice goes a long way in determining whether or not democracy will endure. Earlier, we saw that there were a number of highly active political parties before independence and then during the First and Second republics. The military regime then created two new parties as part of the transition to a third republic, which ended with the ill-fated presidential election of 1993.

Afterward, the Abacha government banned all partisan activity, a ban that remained in effect as what turned out to be sham consultations on a new constitution began. Indeed, it was only after Abacha’s death in June 1998 that the government authorized the creation of new political parties.

Unlike the parties created along with the second republic, the parties that sprang to live in late 1998 had little in common with earlier institutions. That is not to say, however, that they were independent of the outgoing military regime.
In all, nine political parties gained legal recognition. Of them, only three did well enough in state and local elections to run in the 1999 legislative and presidential elections (See Tables 6 and 7).

And of them, two had close links indeed to the military. Obasanjo and others who had come to oppose the Abacha government in the mid-1990s (though only after many of them had been sent to prison) formed the People’s Democratic Party. There are widely believed rumors, however, that the PDP has close ties to the military, especially to supporters of former President Babangida who is said to have donated as much as $18 million to the party’s coffers. The smaller All People’s Party (APP) is led by politicians who were close to Abacha. Only the small Alliance for Democracy (AD) had anything approaching serious democratic credentials, since it was led by people who had been close to Abiola. What’s more, in all the articles written on the 1999 elections, the parties’ goals and ideologies are rarely mentioned, since they hardly figured in the campaign.

The elections largely lived up to the mixed expectations of most observers.

On the one hand, Obasanjo and the PDP did about as well as expected. The party handily won the legislative elections totaling just under 60 percent of the vote and the seats for both houses. Their poor showing in the legislative elections prompted the AD and APP to run a single candidate, Ole Falae, in the presidential election. Obasanjo, however, did slightly better than his party had in that two-way race, winning nearly 63 percent of the vote, though he ran poorly in his native Yoruba-dominated west.

On the other hand, there were the all-too-frequent charges of electoral fraud that prompted Falae to challenge the outcome in the courts. International and domestic monitors agreed that there had been considerable abuse. The most flagrant examples included instances in which the polls never opened because local officials arrived at the voting stations with ballot papers that had already been filled out. Nonetheless, most impartial observers felt that there were abuses on all sides, and that they were not extensive enough to have altered the outcome of the election. The courts then threw out Falae’s challenge and Obasanjo took office on schedule.

Table 6
The Legislative Elections—1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>% of the Vote</th>
<th>Number of seats</th>
<th>% of the Vote</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APP</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADD</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: 12 seats in the House of Representatives and 1 in the Senate were still to be filled when these results were published by the Nigerian government.

Table 7  
The Presidential Election—1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate and Party</th>
<th>% of the Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olusegun Obasanjo (PDP)</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olu Falae (AD/APP)</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relatively smooth 1999 elections should not obscure the fact that ethnicity and the tensions that go with it remain just below the surface at any time. To see that, consider this typical Hausa song used by the NPN during its 1983 campaign.

Every slimy (NPP) supporter is a dog.

If he dies, do not bury him.

Burn him in fire, the ingrate dog.

Jatau Oye, Governor Rimi of Kano) is a slave to the Jews.

He will teach your sons to be effeminate.

They will tie women's wrappers round their hips.

He treats people like dirt.

Kano has ...elected a consummate hypocrite.

May God take away this Satan,

King of the Ingrates."

The Fragile Nigerian State

For the twenty years or so, academics have been engaged in a debate about the weight that should be given to the study of non-western societies in undergraduate education. Afrocentrists argue that White scholars in the United States and Europe have consciously and systematically kept things African out of Western curricula. Moreover, they claim that when White scholars do
include African issues, they do so in a demeaning and misleading way, for instance, by ignoring pre-colonial accomplishments or excessively criticizing modern African states. It is not just academics, of course. Africa rarely makes it into our popular culture, and when it does, it is often with the naiveté and even racist humor of the two *The Gods Must Be Crazy* films that portray Africans either as innocent savages or as incompetent politicians.

But when it comes to African states, the Afrocentrists are only partially correct. African states are weak, and one can say that without demeaning Nigerians or any other African people. With the single exception (and then only partial) of stifling dissent, the Nigerian state has not been able to reach its policy goals, whether run by civilians or military officers.

That does not mean that Nigeria has been an abject failure. There is now little or no debate about the Nigerian nation. Most of the ethnic, regional, and religious problems remain, but they no longer threaten to tear the country apart. Moreover, there are policy areas, such as higher education or the establishment of the Youth Service Corps, in which the Nigerian state has done rather well. On balance, however, the Nigerian state remains weak, especially as far as policy making and implementation are concerned.

*Weak Central Institutions*

In Chapter 13, I suggested that the weakness of third world states is best reflected in their ineffectual central institutions. That might seem surprising at first glance. Abacha and the military leaders who preceded him controlled the central state institutions with an iron fist. There was little organized opposition, and there were surprisingly few protests against major human rights violations such as the 1995 announcement to extend military rule for three more years.

Similarly, when Abacha and his colleagues seized power in November 1993, they dissolved the Parliament and banned the two political parties that had been created under Babangida. In their place, they created a new set of supposedly temporary institutions to run the country until it could be returned to civilian rule.

Each new regime has done much the same thing. Thus, with the exception of the civil service, the central institutions in Nigeria have rarely lasted more than a few years, and their structures and operations have reflected the views of whichever group happened to be in power at the time.

Under Abacha, the Nigerian state was headed by two bodies. By far the more powerful of the two was the Provisional Ruling Council, which replaced the AFRC of Babangida's days. It had twenty-two members at the time (all military officers) and was chaired by Sani Abacha in his role as head of government. There was also a twenty-seven-member Federal Executive Council also chaired by Abacha, twenty-five of whom were civilians. On paper, this council looked something like a cabinet since it included ministers for foreign affairs, defense, and so on. Many of its initial members were civilian politicians who had been active in the years and months before the 1993 coup. Nonetheless, all real power was held by the military, and most of it remained in Abacha's hands alone.
The problems are compounded by other difficulties. Neither the military nor the police could assure basic law and order in Lagos, the former capital that now has about eight million people and one of the world's highest crime rates. Foreign diplomats and business executives rarely leave their homes without armed escorts. The bodies of people killed in traffic accidents are frequently left by the side of the road, because the people who are supposed to collect them are afraid of being attacked by gang members or being held until they pay a bribe to the police.

Public servants are often unpaid, and when they do get their salaries, they do not take home enough money to live on. As a result, many are corrupt. It does not take much to convince garbage collectors or teachers to go on strike. The telephone system works intermittently at best outside of Lagos and Abuja. Electrical blackouts occur frequently. Cities lack even rudimentary sanitation systems.

The Nigerian state does not have many resources. A full 82 percent of its revenue comes from either the sale of oil or taxes on the profits of the operations of the multinational petroleum companies. When oil prices plummet—as they have frequently since the early 1980s—so does the government's income.

That may change under the new republic, but the initial signs were not all that encouraging. That begins with the fact that the new constitution was not published until after the legislative elections took place and many of its provisions were not known until after Obasanjo was inaugurated. As the Nobel Prize winner, Wole Soyinka, put it:

Where on earth was ever an election held to decide a change of regime under rules that did not spell out the functions of the elective offices, their relations to one another, their statutory expectations in the all-important material means to governance, an election without a definition of the relations of the parts to the center, without a clear demarcation of zones of responsibility and authority, without even a certain knowledge of their incumbency?

The centerpiece of the new state will be its American-style presidency, which is not responsible to the legislature. It, in turn, has two houses, a 360 member House of Representatives elected from single-member districts and a 109 member Senate composed of three people elected from each state plus a single official from the capital region of Abuja.

There is much skepticism, however. On the one hand, the new president has brought new people in to many key offices, and there are many political newcomers in the House of Representatives, Senate, and state legislatures. On the other hand, Obasanjo has surrounded himself with advisors and civil servants who also served under the military, claiming that "you can’t just wave away a whole generation of politicians" overnight in a country that is sorely lacking talented, experienced public officials.

Obasanjo was also quoted as saying, "we need someone who can act as a bridge for a gradual disengagement of the military. If we don’t have someone who can understand them, then I think we will have problems." To his supporters, such statements reflect his pragmatic realization that lasting democratization can only come dramatically and cannot occur if civilian authorities rub
the officers the wrong way. To his critics, they are worrisome signs that Obasanjo remains far closer to the military than his public image and statements might suggest.

Corruption

The weakness of those policy-making and administrative institutions is reflected in the widespread corruption that has plagued Nigerian politics since the 1960s. As with state operations in general, there is much we do not know about the magnitude of the problem since corrupt officials rarely talk about their affairs. There is no doubt, however, that corruption is widespread. There was thus little surprise when a 1996 poll of international business executives rated Nigeria the most corrupt country in the world. Similarly, Obasanjo built much of his political base for his return to power as head of Transparency International, an NGO that primarily works to uncover corruption in the relations between businesses and governments.

Corruption takes many forms, including growing concern about official Nigerian complicity in the drug trade. Nigeria is one of but four countries to be cited by the United States for not cooperating in global drug enforcement efforts, and it is widely known to be a transit point for drugs heading for Europe and the United States.

Perhaps even more worrisome for Nigerian domestic politics are the reports regarding public officials. In 1995, 60 Minutes broadcast a program on scams run by Nigerian "businessmen" seeking "investment capital" from naive, rich foreigners. "Charges" (a euphemism for bribes) are exacted for ignoring environmental regulations on imported goods or even getting a boarding card for an airplane flight.

The customs system is notorious. According to one importer, "No one pays the full customs duty. The going rate is to pay the customs officer a third of the difference between the official rate of duty and what you actually pay in duty (usually nothing)."

Under the military, the government encouraged foreign investment (see the section on economic policy later for details), but official approval for an import or joint venture contract typically only came when individual officers get their "personal interests" satisfied. Personal interests came in the form of cars, offshore bank accounts, or tuition fees for their children's schooling in England. Shell and other companies are alleged to "buy" popular support for their activities by handing out liquor and cash.

In 1992, Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) had a gap of $2.7 billion, or 10 percent of the country’s total GNP, between what international experts say it earned and what it claims it took in. The assumption is that that money had been diverted to offshore accounts of the leadership. To make matters worse, even though Nigeria is the world’s sixth leading producer of oil, there is a gasoline shortage. Gas stations are usually out, and consumers who want gas have to buy it on a black market controlled by soldiers and pay seven or more times the official price.

The corruption has reached the very top. The Abubakar and Obasanjo governments have both sought to recover money Abacha, his family, and his supporters spirited out of the country. Before he turned power over to Obasanjo, Abubakar obtained about $750 million from those
accounts. Then, on 26 October 1999, lawyers representing the government filed suit in Switzerland demanding another $2.2 billion that had been illegally sent to Abacha family accounts there.

Overall, the Obasanjo government has made a major attempt to reduce corruption. The 93 top generals who served under Abacha were replaced as soon as Obasanjo took office. He also revoked all appointments and contracts made by the military after 1 January 1999. During his October 1999 visit to Washington and in almost all his other public statements for domestic as well as international audiences, he stressed the new regime’s commitment to honesty. But, since this chapter was written only five months after the government took office, it is far too early to tell how much it can do about the corruption that has contributed heavily to the country’s enduring poverty.

Disruptive Federalism

The last troublesome part of the Nigerian state is its structure. At independence, the country was divided into three regions that maximized the influence of the three leading ethnic groups but also made it hard to separate regional and national conflict. Moreover, there was no protection for the smaller ethnic groups. After the crises that wracked the western region in 1962 and 1963, the government agreed to the creation of the fourth, mid-western region in 1964, but as we saw earlier, that did little to defuse political tensions. The first military regime abolished the regions and divided the country into twelve states, six in the north and three each in the east and west. The authors of the Second Republic constitution further divided the states, creating a total of nineteen, of which the three main ethnic groups would control twelve and the smaller ones seven. In the late 1980s, Babangida's government created two new states and a federal district around the newly created capital city of Abuja. In August 1991, yet another nine new states (making a total of 36) were formed in an attempt to defuse ethnic and other tensions. There are also 449 local governments, which combine elected officials and traditional authorities, although their numbers and composition have fluctuated dramatically over the years.

In some ways, the changes in state and local government structures have been successful. Now, most of the significant ethnic groups control the regions in which they live, which was not possible in the days of three or four regions. Moreover, the creation of smaller states has made local politics less and less a part of the all-or-nothing nature of national competition.

In the late 1970s and again in the 1990s, those sub-national units also played a vital role in the attempts to return to democracy. In each case, it was hoped that creating relatively homogeneous state and local governments and holding elections at those levels first would smooth the way to peaceful democratic politics at the national level as well. State politics may also be eased by the new government’s decision to allow them to keep a third more of the money they raise through taxation than had been the case under the military.

In other ways, however, the federal system has been a hindrance to democracy and stability. There has always been considerable uncertainty about what the respective responsibilities of the state and federal governments should be. Moreover, the inevitable duplication of services between federal, state, and local officials is bound to be a drain in a country with such limited
resources. Most of all, federalism has reinforced ethnicity as the most important and disruptive issue in Nigerian political life. It has helped provide areas of "home rule" for the major ethnic groups, just as the redrawing of state lines has in India. But it also has made ethnic identity the main stepping-stone to political power, however the national leaders have tried to write rules for national political parties and other institutions.

*The Personalization of Power*

One final theme should help tie these themes together--the personalization of power in Nigeria and much of the rest of the third world.

Everywhere, we have a tendency to identify policies or problems with the individual men and women who are in power at the time thereby exasperating their importance in the process. There is, of course, no better example of that than giving former President Gorbachev so much of the credit for Soviet reform efforts and so much of the blame for its collapse.

In an established regime like that in the Soviet Union at the time, it probably is a mistake to do so. In a country like Nigeria in which most institutions are weak, the person who occupies an office is often far more important than the formal responsibilities and rules for the office itself.

That emphasis on the individual politician may work out well when he or she is someone of integrity and talent, as seems to be the case for President Obasanjo. But, it also opens the door even wider for the abuse or, simply, the poor use of power when the individuals involved lack either the ethical principles or the ability he and a handful of other Nigerian politicians have demonstrated, over the years.

In sum, Nigeria provides us with an excellent example of the paradoxical nature of the state in much of the third world. On the one hand, the state is expected to play a major role in almost all areas of public and private life. From forging a sense of national unity to developing the economy, almost everything passes through it. On the other hand, the Nigerian state is quite weak and has not been able to make much progress toward reaching any of those goals that have been thrust on it.

*Nigerian Public Policy and Public Futility*

Two issues have dominated public policy making in Nigeria since it gained its independence—democratization and development. No government—civilian or military—has made much lasting progress on either front, giving rise to the widespread futility and dissatisfaction that characterizes political life there today.

*Democratization*

Political scientists have rarely included the development of democracy as part of a country's public policy. In the past few years, however, political scientists have had to shift their attention to it because so many formerly communist countries as well as many third world states have begun conscious, planned attempts to create liberal democratic regimes.
For the most part, Africa has lagged behind the rest of the world in democratization, and no African country has fared worse in this respect than Nigeria. Nigeria's first experiment with democracy involved very little political choice or public planning. The parliamentary system it adopted at independence was inherited from the British, and neither the colonizers nor the colonized seriously considered any other options.

Development economists often refer to factories that are built by outsiders and then handed over to third world businesses or governments as turnkey operations because the new operations literally only have to "turn the key" to get them to work. Such operations are rarely successful because the designers have not adapted the facility to local conditions, including the lack of trained technical employees who can make the factory work and repair it if things break down. In that sense, the First Republic, like most of the initial African regimes, was a "turnkey government."

As noted earlier, the Nigerian military created what it thought would be a more appropriate presidential regime in 1979. However, it did not survive its second election as the ethnically driven, high-stakes politics tore it apart and prompted the military to seize power four years later.

Since then, there have been two more attempts to build a democracy, both of which we will explore in some detail here, because they show us the difficulties of doing so in a country as divided as Nigeria.

Babangida’s Failure

After he seized power in 1985, General Babangida decided to make democratization the center piece of what he claimed would be a brief period of military rule. Many observers are convinced that Babangida was never strongly committed to democracy or civilian government. Researchers have yet to get access to documentary and other evidence about what really happened inside his government, so we simply do not know how seriously to take those charges. Here, I have chosen to take his government at its word, especially early on, since even without the skepticism about its motivations, the failure of democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s tells us a lot about both Nigeria and the third world as a whole.

Babangida's supporters always claimed he endorsed what is known as the "custodial theory" which holds that military government can only be justified on a temporary basis and only to prepare the return to civilian rule. Therefore, one of the first things the Babangida government did was to try to assess what had gone wrong in the First and Second republics. At the heart of any such explanation was the way ethnic and regional conflict, corruption, and the concentration of power at the center had turned politics into a zero-sum game that no one dared lose.

In designing a third republic, its creators therefore sought to engineer different institutions through which a more cooperative, if not consensual, politics could operate. They started by banning all leading politicians and parties from the First and Second republics on the assumption that they had now twice demonstrated that they could not run the country. Then, in 1986, they laid out a phased transition that was scheduled to last four years. During that time, the politicians
who lack practical experience in democratic practices or civil administration would gain some starting at the local level. In the process, they could "learn" from whatever mistakes they made or problems they encountered when the stakes were relatively low and later apply the new "lessons" to the more nettlesome national issues that would be tackled only at the end of the transitional period.

The plan itself was the product of a seventeen-member Political Bureau appointed in January 1986. Significantly, the bureau did not include any civil servants, prominent politicians, or other figures publicly associated with either the current or former regime. Instead, it consisted of a balanced group of middle-class Nigerians, nine of whom had academic backgrounds.

Although there were some changes in detail later on, the Political Bureau's main recommendations became the basis of the democratization plan that ultimately was to collapse in 1993. The plan called for a decentralized system in which each of the main groups would dominate in at least one of the then thirty-one states. Just as important was the conclusion that the party and electoral systems had to be rebuilt from scratch. The government would license new political parties that could not get by with narrowly based, ethnic support. The federal government would also fund the parties so that they would not be dependent on local bosses or corrupt officials. A new, neutral federal election commission would be set up to regulate the way elections were run.

In March 1987, the bureau submitted its report to the AFRC, which reviewed it using a panel of its own. Although it rejected the bureau's preference for a socialist economy (see the next section), it retained most of its other conclusions. Just as significantly, it ruled out any kind of "dyarchy" through which the military and civilian politicians would rule together. It did, however, push back the planned completion for the transition, tentatively setting presidential elections for August 1992 rather than the bureau's goal of late 1990.

Later that year, the government issued a series of decrees setting up the official plans for the transition. Realizing that democracy requires a more enlightened population than Nigeria had, the government created a Directorate for Social Mobilization whose head described its mission as follows: "If you want democratic government to be sustained over time, then the people have to be enlightened, mobilized, and properly educated." The government also split the powerful and often repressive National Security Organization (secret police) into a number of smaller, specialized, and, thus, presumably weaker bodies.

At the same time, it published a time table for the next five years. 1987 would see the creation of the National Electoral Commission and other such bodies, as well as local government elections on a nonpartisan basis. In 1989, a new constitution would be drafted, the new parties created, and, partisan local elections held. In 1990, there would be state elections leading to the creation of civilian state governments. 1991 would be devoted mostly to taking a census, something that had not been possible since the 1960s. Finally, there would be federal legislative and presidential elections in the first six to nine months of 1992, after which the military would give up power.

The problems with the plans surfaced almost immediately. As we saw in the section on the stakes of Nigerian politics, the Babangida government hemmed and hawed and at crucial
junctures manipulated the process in a way that made democratization more difficult, if not
impossible. Thus, it rejected all thirteen of the potential parties that emerged from grassroots
organizational efforts and created two of its own practically out of thin air. Then, it rejected the
presidential candidates the two parties initially nominated and sent them back to the drawing
boards.

The 1993 presidential election campaign was the most honest and least violent in Nigerian
history up to that point. Nonetheless, the government rejected the results and arrested the
apparent winner, Abiola, thereby setting in motion the events that culminated in the coup led by
Abacha later that fall.

Abubakar and Obasanjo

A (so far at least) more successful move toward democracy came in 1999 as we also saw earlier.
Ironically, this shift occurred with far less prior planning. Indeed, it took place only after the
Abacha regime became by far the most corrupt and repressive in Nigerian history, thereby
leading most observers to think that democracy was less—rather than more—likely than in the
early 1990s.

Nothing epitomized the depths to which the regime had sunk than the 10 November 1995
execution of the author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his fellow environmental activists from the
oil-producing Ogoniland region. In 1990, no one would have expected Saro-Wiwa to be accused
of capital crimes. Students throughout Nigeria read his novels at school, and he wrote the
screenplay for the country's most popular soap opera, Basi and Company, about an all-too-
familiar street hustler in Lagos. Hardly a radical, Saro-Wiwa spent most of his time in England.

Saro-Wiwa had made plans to write a new novel that would have woven together much of his
country's sad history since the military first took power in 1966, but he never started it. Instead,
he got involved in the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which was
formed in the early 1990s to demand self-determination for the half-million member tribe that
lives along the Niger River delta about a hundred miles inland from the Atlantic coast.

Ogoniland sits atop oil deposits. Although it was not one of the most productive regions in the
country, Shell Oil had pumped billions of gallons of oil from that part of the Niger delta over the
years. Most of the profits ended up in Shell's boardrooms and in the Swiss bank accounts of
Nigeria's military rulers. Precious little of the money made it back to Ogoniland, where there has
been no significant investment in electricity, roads, drinking water, or other desperately needed
infrastructural projects. MOSOP also claimed that leaks from drilling and poorly maintained
pipelines were polluting Ogoni farmlands and the waters its people fished in.

In mid-1993, MOSOP called on the Ogoni people to boycott the presidential election that was
held to complete the transition from military back to civilian rule. MOSOP's frustrations only
mounted when the military government refused to accept the results of the election and, then, the
seventh successful coup since the country's independence in 1960 brought Abacha, to power. Not
all Ogonis agreed with Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP, and tensions within the region mounted. In
1994, a group of young men, allegedly MOSOP members, shot and killed four pro-government chiefs at a political rally. Saro-Wiwa and the others executed with him in 1995 were arrested for ordering the murders, a charge he always denied.

According to most international observers, the legal proceedings against them were a farce. Saro-Wiwa was only allowed to talk with his lawyers if the local military leader was present. The officers who presided at his trial were alleged to have personally benefited from the oil trade. Some witnesses later claimed they had been bribed to give false testimony. The defendants were all convicted as expected.

Meanwhile, the government cracked down in Ogoniland. Its "sanitization" campaign killed more than two thousand people, displaced a quarter of the total population, and destroyed thirty villages.

The death sentences were carried out only ten days after they had been imposed following what many observers felt in Nigeria and abroad felt was a less than fair trial. Because of pressure from the international community, the expectation was that the Abacha government would at least commute the sentences. However, the military leaders turned a deaf ear to pleas to spare Saro-Wiwa and rubbed salt in the wounds by executing the nine while the heads of governments from all the Commonwealth of Nations countries were attending a summit meeting in New Zealand.

This wave of repression turned out to be the last straw both at home and abroad. More than thirty countries immediately withdrew their ambassadors. Western leaders threatened to stop all pending trade and aid deals although in the end only military and certain other kinds of assistance were cut. More importantly, the British Commonwealth and the Clinton administration put strong pressure on the regime to change. Meanwhile, new protest groups developed at home, sparked both by the repression, the corruption, and the country’s ongoing economic difficulties. Much of the protest focused on the release of Abiola and the establishment of the government that had been elected in 1993.

No one knows what would have happened had Abacha and Abiola not both died in rapid succession in the summer of 1998. Their deaths, however, did open the door to a remarkably rapid chain of events (especially given Nigeria’s history) that led to the creation of the Obasanjo government less than a year later.

Almost immediately after taking office, Abubakar made it clear that he was not planning to perpetuate military rule. He immediately began negotiating with Abiola about the latter’s release and the transition to civilian rule. In fact, Abiola was meeting with a group of American diplomats in his cell on that very subject when he suffered his fatal heart attack.

Abubakar then announced that he still planned a return to civilian rule within a year and soon announced a timetable for the recreation of political parties and the holding of elections. In a number of subtle ways, General Abubakar made it clear that he would not be like his predecessors. He also started the crackdown on the Abacha family fortune mentioned earlier. And, at the ECOWAS (Economic Council of West African States) summit in late 1998, he announced that this was the one and only time that he would be addressing the delegates.
In the end, Abubakar held true to his word and retired on 29 May 1999. The fact that he did so raises an obvious question that lurks below the surface of these two narratives. Why, if democratization has been such a central plank of government policy for so long, and why, if practically every one professed to believe in it, did it fail so miserably in 1993 but not 1998?

To some extent, the answers reflect the specifics of Nigerian politics. Any such list would have to start with the manipulative and power-hungry side of the Babangida (but not the Abubakar) government that its critics properly point to. To some extent, too, it reflects the international pressures and worsening economic conditions which we will turn to next. And, perhaps most of all, it reflects the willingness of Abubakar and politicians like Obasanjo to find ways of working together and forging a gradual, consensual transition to civilian rule and democracy.

Though they have not yet done so, scholars interested in comparative politics and the general process of democratization will undoubtedly stress some of the characteristics that Nigeria shares with other third world countries in similar situations. In their recent analyses, political scientists have stressed a number of factors that seem to be necessary preconditions for successful democratization, all of which Nigeria has had in short supply at least until the late 1998s.

For example, they focus on the importance of elite accommodation. For democracy to work, elites have to be willing to work with each other enough to forge compromises and other decisions that they are all willing to abide by. Democratic regimes also emerge most easily if the transition can be achieved gradually and if partially democratic politics begin in a regime in which participation is limited and then expands to include an ever-larger proportion of the population, much as we saw to have been the case in Great Britain. That is not possible in Nigeria today, but the last two democratization efforts have started with the less contentious state and local politics before turning on to the national level. Observers also are convinced that democracy is most likely to succeed if there is substantial national unity and, therefore, limited fundamental opposition to the existence of the state if not the particular regime in place at the time. The Abubakar regime could not create that sense of unity in a few short months. At the very least, however, they did little to unravel it further which stood it in good stead as it got ready to hand over power.

That said, there is no reason to be overly optimistic about this most recent attempt at democratic government in Nigeria. The most important conclusion to emerge from the literature on democratization is that no amount of constitutional engineering or tinkering with established institutions can eliminate the debilitating effects of a situation in which people tend to view all issues and all conflict as zero-sum in nature. And, there is every reason to believe that such an approach to politics will reappear either once the initial enthusiasm for the new regime declines or when Obasanjo leaves office after his four-year term. After all, it was the second election that did in the first two Nigerian republics.

**Economic Development and Structural Adjustment**

As you saw at the beginning of this chapter, the Nigerian economy is in shambles. While there have been moments when the economy was growing at a respectable rate and the future seemed promising, the country has not been able to take any significant steps that would dramatically
improve the living conditions of its mostly impoverished population. Moreover, its economy has declined dramatically for most of the past decade, and the signs currently point to an uncertain but also unpromising future which is fraught with political implications.

In many respects, Nigeria has a typical economy for a third world country. Most Nigerians live in utter poverty. Also, like most countries in the third world, Nigeria's economy is largely based on the export of "primary" products and the import of some food, most manufactured goods, and almost all investment capital. That pattern invariably leaves the third world vulnerable because it is so reliant on at most a few commodities whose prices fluctuate on world markets.

In Nigeria's case, the situation might not seem so bad because the commodity it exports the most is oil. Indeed, many observers expected oil revenues to turn Nigeria into one of Africa's, and perhaps even the world's, leading economic powers.

Instead, Nigeria's attempts at development have fallen flat on their face. The economy went into a tailspin in the mid-1980s from which it has yet to recover, despite having adopted the structural adjustment policies all but forced on Nigeria by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and other financial institutions.

In part, that failure reflects the corruption and mismanagement discussed earlier. It also reflects forces beyond the Nigerian government's control. Oil prices have not stayed anywhere near as high as they were after the price shocks of 1973 and 1979. In 1989 alone, for example, the price of oil on the spot market dropped from about $21 to $14 a barrel in on six-month period. That drop cost the Nigerian government almost a third of the export revenues it had been counting on to pay for its import bills and to finance industrial and other development projects.

When combined with all its other problems, the drop in oil prices produced a crisis of massive proportions. In the second half of the 1980s alone, plummeting oil prices led to a more than 80 per cent fall in GNP. Per capita income stood at about $1,000 year but dropped by roughly 80 percent during the course of the decade and only rebounded slightly in the 1990s.

The official value of its currency has never been a terribly good indicator of its real value, since anyone who can trades on black market in which the naira is worth quite a bit less. Nonetheless, its value dropped by about half in the 1980s, a decline that continued through the 1990s. In October 1999, the US dollar was worth 95 naira; the exchange rate was 50 naira to the dollar, when the last edition of Comparative Politics was published in 1996. The drop in the naira’s value is one of the reasons why the country's total debt had gone up by about 1,000 percent during the last twenty years.

These are not just statistical abstractions. At the every day level, the economic changes took a terrible toll on people's lives. The cost of basic foodstuffs increased by a minimum of 250 percent in the second half of the 1980s alone. The price of imported goods has risen even faster.

Until the late 1980s Nigerian leaders, civilian and military alike, pursued a fairly common development strategy. In the 1960s and 1970s, they focused on developing Nigeria's industrial base so it could reduce its reliance on imported goods. That, in turn, mean relying heavily on
foreign aid and loans for the investment capital for the start-up money that Nigeria could not provide on its own. Thus, right after independence, the United States government gave Nigeria a $225-million grant for roads, water supply, and education. As Nigeria's first Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa put it:

We welcome aid whether in the form of foreign investment, loan or grant. So long as this assistance is given in a spirit of genuine desire to make life happier for the people, we would gladly accept and welcome it.6

Over the years, Nigeria did receive considerable aid from both governmental and private sources, which it used to help build universities, factories, and modern urban amenities in Lagos, Abuja, and its other major cities.

Typical was the Delta steel complex in Aladja in Bendel state, which opened in 1982. Creating a locally run, integrated steel and iron industry has always been a high priority for the Nigerian or any third world government because they are components of almost all modern industrial products. The Aladja mill was to provide steel rods and other products for other factories that would produce finished "rolling" steel. The Nigerian government played a major role in this and other development projects. Normally, it was the recipient of the foreign aid or loans. Either on its own or through the more than ninety partially private and partially public organizations known as parastatals, it determined how and where those funds would be invested.

Typical, too, is the fact that the Aladja mill did not live up to expectations. It never operated at more than 20 percent of capacity, which means that other factories that depend on its products were underutilized as well. Another project, the Adjaokuta steel mill, was projected to be Africa's largest steel factory when it was conceived in the boom years of the 1970s, but it is now a decade behind schedule and could end up being more than $4 billion over budget when it is finally completed.

There are lots of reasons for the problems with the iron, steel, and most other industrial sectors. Skilled labor is in short supply. Replacement parts and repairs in general are too expensive. Nigeria's legendary corruption extends into the economic arena as well as the political. There has also been far less foreign aid than Nigerians expected, far less than the 0.7 percent of GNP annually that the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries initially pledged a generation ago.

Whatever the reasons, the bottom line is clear. Nigeria in the 1980s could not meet its own industrial demand. In iron and steel, that reached about six million metric tons in 1990, but even if all its plants that were either in operation or under construction worked at full capacity, it would only have been able to produce 1.3 million metric tons. The same basic pattern held in every other industrial sector.

There were problems with agriculture as well. As noted earlier, until colonization, the territory that became Nigeria could easily feed its people. During the colonial period. Nigeria was a major exporter of agricultural products. But after independence, Nigerian officials emphasized industrial development at the expense of agriculture. In the 1980s, agricultural products made up
only 3 percent of total exports. Moreover, Nigeria also was heavily dependent on imported food. Despite the grandiose "Operation Feed the Nation" (1976-1979) and "Green Revolution" (1979-1983) schemes, most farmers still use traditional agricultural techniques.

Even though there are now more roads into farming regions, and there are more support services, irrigation, and machinery available to farmers, agricultural production has not increased appreciably. Furthermore, there is very little quality, control in what is produced and marketed. And, as with everything else in Nigerian life, corrupt trading practices take a lot of the potential profit and best produce out of the market.

In keeping with its general policy of import substitution, the Shagari government introduced higher tariffs in 1982 and other policies that would make imports more expensive and thus give a boost to domestic producers. Economic conditions did not improve, which was one of the reasons why the military stepped in the next year.

The new Buhari administration strengthened the existing import restrictions and offered businesses a few new incentives to encourage them to buy needed goods domestically. Government spending was cut and new projects frozen, which led to the forced layoffs of thousands of workers. Meanwhile, the price of oil continued to plummet. As it did, the country's debt spiraled upward at which point, the international financial institutions that "owned" the debt stepped in. The Buhari government had to apply to the International Monetary Fund's Extended Fund Facility for a loan to cover its immediate problems and restructure its long-term debt. The IMF only agreed to grant the money and negotiate new terms for the outstanding loans if the government agreed to a very different set of macroeconomic policies, conditions that have come to be known as conditionality. The IMF's conditions were part of the reason for Babangida's 1985 coup, leading the new government to declare an economic state of emergency that October. A massive public debate ensued. Ultimately, the government decided to reject the IMF loans under the proposed terms, but it did agree to do whatever was necessary to restructure Nigeria's economy in a more profitable direction, which, in the end, meant acceding to Northern demands.

Late that year, Babangida announced a two-year structural adjustment program, which has been extended in one form or another ever since. Its goal was to expand exports other than oil, reduce the import of goods that could be manufactured locally, achieve self-sufficiency in food production, and, most notably, increase the role of the private sector. Strategically, Babangida sought to reduce the state's economic involvement. Tariffs were reduced and import-license procedures simplified and, in some cases, eliminated altogether. In 1986 alone, seventeen parastatals were privatized, and by 1990, sixteen more had been as well. Plans were in the works to sell off another thirty or so.

So far, structural adjustment's record is mixed. There is more investment capital around, including $170 million from the private wing of the World Bank to help fund the development of a natural gas field.

On balance, however, the transition has been difficult. The debt remains high, and debt service continues to eat up about a third of the government's annual budget. The official inflation rate increased from 12 percent in 1987 to nearly 50 percent in 1989 before it began to level off.
Unemployment is estimated to be at least 30 percent. The federal government is deeply in debt. With the drop in world oil prices in the late 1990s, the government has less than $3 billion in cash reserves.

Nigeria has opened its economy up to more outside investment. For instance, it is now possible for foreign investors to own a 50-percent share of existing enterprises and a controlling ownership or, in some cases, even total ownership of new ones. Whatever the other benefits of structural adjustment, economic control is likely to shift either outside the country altogether or to a small, increasingly wealthy domestic elite. Economic inequalities are likely to increase, and there are going to be few, if any incentives for the beneficiaries of economic growth to deal with poverty and other social problems.

The situation as of this writing is rather confusing. Obasanjo has pledged to continue the structural adjustment policies. Thus, parts of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation will be privatized. He has also appointed a new chief executive officer for the company as a first step in trying to rid it of the corruption that has marked its dealings with the multinationals who have invested in Nigeria. On the other hand, his close links with officials from the Babangida government give many observers pause on this front as well.

**Nigeria and the Plight of the Third World**

At this point you might well be asking a question that has lurked below the surface throughout this chapter. Why should there even be a Nigeria! After all, Nigeria as we know it, began as an artificial creation of the colonial powers, and its history has at best been a rocky one ever since. It has never come close to creating an effective government or a modern economy despite all the human and natural resources Achebe alluded to in the statement that begins this chapter. In other words, it may well be the case that the Nigerian people would be better off if the country split up into at least three parts representing the main geographical and ethnic divisions of the First Republic.

That question is well worth asking of many other countries, which are also suffering from the combined effects of ethnic strife, corruption, military rule, underdevelopment, environmental decay, and the like. But all the signs are that it is a question that is not likely to be asked by the people who will be determining the future of Nigeria and similar countries.

For good or ill, most modern nation states and their boundaries seem set in stone for the foreseeable future, especially in Africa. In short, whatever scenarios might seem more plausible to outside observers, Nigerians and Liberians and Kenyans and South Africans probably do not have the Soviet or Yugoslavian option. They are stuck with each other and seem consigned to trying to find workable solutions within the limits imposed by existing national boundaries.

**Key Terms**

<p>| Concepts | People | Acronyms | Organizations |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places and Events</th>
<th>Dual mandate</th>
<th>Abacha, Sani</th>
<th>AD (Alliance for Democracy)</th>
<th>Biafra</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>Abiola, Moshood</td>
<td>AG (Action Group)</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Abubakar, Abdulsalami</td>
<td>APP (All People’s Party)</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<td>Import substitution</td>
<td>Babangida, Ibrahim</td>
<td>IMF (International Monetary Fund)</td>
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<td>Indirect rule</td>
<td>Obasanjo, Olusegun</td>
<td>MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogonia People)</td>
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<td>Parastatal</td>
<td>Saro-Wiwa, Ken</td>
<td>NCBWA (National Congress of British West Africa)</td>
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<td>Patron-client relationships</td>
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<td>NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons)</td>
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<td>Structural adjustment</td>
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<td>NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union)</td>
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<td>Yoruba</td>
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<td>NPC (Northern People’s Congress)</td>
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<td>Zero-sum</td>
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<td>NPN (National Party of Nigeria)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>NPP (Nigerian People’s Party)</td>
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<td>NRC (National Republican)</td>
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Critical Thinking Exercises

1. Much has changed in the world since this book was finished in late 1999. Does the analysis of Nigeria presented in this chapter still make sense? In what ways? Why (not)?

2. Public opinion pollsters routinely ask questions about whether people think the country is headed in the "right direction" or is "on the wrong track. If you were asked such a question about Nigeria, what would your answer be? Why did you reach that conclusion?

3. How have ethnic differences made the establishment of a stable democracy so difficult in Nigeria? What could be done about that?

4. Leftist scholars often argue that outside forces dating from at least the colonial period are more responsible for the problems a country like Nigeria faces than its own domestic political forces are. Do you agree? Why (not)?

5. Despite the repeated military coups, the Nigerian army has not been able to establish a state that is anywhere near as strong as either Iraq under Saddam Hussein or the Soviet Union before Mikhail Gorbachev. Why do you think that is the case?

Useful Web Sites

Africans have less access to the Internet than residents of any other continent. Nonetheless, there are a number of good sites for students of comparative politics.
Perhaps the most important of these offer news about Nigeria, which is rarely covered in the western press. The best include the *Post Express* newspaper’s on line service plus Nigeria.com and Emporg:

http://www.postexpresswired.com

http://www.nigeria.com

http://emporg.com

The World History Archives has material on the origins and evolution of Nigeria’s military regimes:


All the best academic and other sources are housed at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for African Studies

http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Country_Specific/Nigeria.html

### Selected Reading


Miles, William. *Elections in Nigeria: A Grassroots Perspective*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1988. This book has an exaggerated title. It is not really about elections in Nigeria as a whole but about the 1983 election in one village in the north. And that is why the book is so valuable; it helps a reader who has not had any firsthand experience in Nigeria to gain some real sense of what political life there is really like.
