

CHAPTER 13

Politics In Nigeria

Nigeria represents a typical “Third World” country. The government is attempting to implement democratic reforms but these are challenged by serious economic and other problems in the country. Nigeria is the largest country in Africa. It has petroleum resources, a large military, and many universities. It is a developing country with much ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. Its forms of government have alternated between military and “democratic” rule. Many political scientists regard Nigeria as having characteristics typical to a developing country. Much of the population is very poor, and the government has a history of corruption and instability. In spite of its oil wealth, the government is frequently unable to provide adequate social services to its citizens. A high percentage of Nigerians have diseases like AIDS and malaria, but sadly, many in Nigeria can die from treatable diseases because of the lack of medical care.

CURRENT POLICY CHALLENGES

In recent years, the country’s ethnic, regional, and religious divisions have intensified, and important political actors have suggested breaking the country into a loose federation. The constitution will be tested, as Nigerians are frustrated over their government’s inability to capitalize on their potential oil wealth. Nigeria has been ranked as both one of the most corrupt countries in the world and one of the poorest countries in the world. If the democratic governments cannot reap benefits to the poor, many fear that military rule, a frequent pattern in Nigeria, will return.

EFFECTS OF HISTORY

The Enduring Effects of Pre-Colonial Events

Before its colonization by the British, the land that is now Nigeria had many different tribal cultures. The British coined the term “Nigeria” and forcibly formed political boundaries. This brought together peoples with little in common. There are hundreds of different ethnic groups in Nigeria.

When the British colonized Nigeria they took millions of Nigerian men as slaves and used the colony to export natural resources such as palm oil. Under the British, Nigeria was forced to export one or a few commodities and the country grew dependent on this. They left behind a basic infrastructure, Christianity, an education system, and basic ideas of democracy. Nigeria emerged as a federal system with three regions: Northern (**Hausa-Fulani**-dominated), Eastern (**Igbo**-dominated), and Western (**Yoruba**-dominated). Nigeria achieved independence in 1960.

The Colonial Interlude (1900-1960)

The territory today called “Nigeria” was created through British colonization. The artificially drawn boundaries placed the numerous ethnic groups and tribes who once fought each other together. Britain established a system of indirect rule in which a British governor was in charge of managing affairs, often with the assistance of a local ruler.

Britain worked to change the Nigerian economy into an export-based and market orientation. The British also adopted a modern system of transportation and communication to stimulate commerce. The population began to urbanize. Missionaries brought with them education and religion. Children learned English and studied under a British-based educational system.

Nigerian Independence

Nigeria became independent in 1960, with great regional disputes. A corrupt election occurred in 1965, which resulted in violence and a military coup.

ENVIRONMENTAL POTENTIAL AND LIMITATIONS

Conditions Affecting Agricultural Production and the Sale of Primary Commodities

Colonialism had an impact on the Nigerian economy. The British had forced the production and export of certain goods. Peasant farmers were pushed to grow and export goods chosen by the British. Nigeria became dependent on exports for commodities such as palm oil and cocoa.

Disease

Malaria is a disease that affects most Nigerians. Its symptoms can be controlled through medication for those who can afford it. That and the AIDS epidemic slow down the economy and productivity of the country, along with other treatable illnesses.

Population Growth

About 45 percent of the population of Nigeria is under 15 years of age. Children are considered a valuable resource in agricultural societies. The population is growing rapidly, which has a negative impact on growth, because there are only so many resources to go around.

Counting the population in Nigeria has always been controversial because of its implications for the distribution of resources (the larger the population in a district, the more resources it gets). Compared to other countries, Nigeria has a young population – one half of the population is under 15 years of age. Children are a valuable resource, particularly to families in rural areas. Nigeria's population is shifting from a high concentration in rural areas to urban. This means that a smaller portion of the labor force is available for agricultural work and that there is a drop in food production per capita.

Urbanization

Nigeria's urban/rural pattern is common to developing countries – it is primarily rural but is urbanizing quickly. The urban infrastructure is strained as a result. A smaller proportion of the labor force is available for agricultural work, which means a drop in food production, making Nigeria more dependent on imports.

Petroleum

Nigeria has a very valuable natural resource: oil. However, the country's economy has suffered in spite of its oil. Nigeria once relied on oil for imports and large-scale development projects, and the fluctuation in the oil market caused periods of high inflation. This caused Nigeria to fall behind in its debt payments.

Both the location of oil and the distribution of oil benefits have had political consequences, most notably in Biafra, an oil-rich region. Citizens in the state of Biafra (heavily populated by Igbo) were frustrated with the central government for not distributing a greater share of the oil wealth to them, and attempted to secede. Civil war followed, and Biafra remained a state. The Igbo continue to mount violent protests.

The Geographic Distribution of Natural Resources: Political Effects

The eastern region of the country holds most of the country's oil reserves. The national government views the oil as a national resource, but citizens from the east have yet to reap the full benefits of their treasure. This was a direct cause of the Biafra movement in which the east attempted to secede and form their own independent country. However, individuals who own oil in the east tend to be minorities in the Igbo-dominated area – so the question of who would control the oil wealth would not necessarily have been solved. Moreover, the east pays the price of environmental degradation while handing over most of the oil money to the central government. The federal government won the civil war but protests continue. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) claimed responsibility for taking foreign oil investors hostage.

International Environment

One of Nigeria's biggest problems today is the amount of debt it owes to Western creditors. Nigeria sought economic development and seemed to be a good investment due to its oil reserves. When oil prices plummeted, loans became impossible to repay and Nigeria's debt mushroomed. The government spends a high percentage of its annual budget repaying debt, in spite of its need to spend money on social services.

Ethnic Identity

The Igbo live in the southeast and are predominantly Christian. Most of the region is developed for market agriculture. Igbo are the most Westernized and well educated of all the groups. Remember that the Igbo live in an oil-rich region (Biafra) that attempted to secede.

The Hausa (sometimes called the Hausa-Fulani) live in the north and are predominately Muslim. A high proportion of Hausas engage in subsistence agriculture and live in rural undeveloped villages.

The Yoruba live in the southwest and are predominately Christian. The metropolitan area of Lagos, the former capital, is in this region.

British missionaries brought Christianity to Nigeria, and Christianity is still the most widely practiced religion. About 40 percent of the country is Muslim, and some Nigerians still practice traditional religions.

Evolution of Nigerian Nationalism

Nationalism in Nigeria has three main sources: those in the country who favored independence from the British, freed slaves who developed their own subculture, and those educated in England or the United States who were familiar with the decolonization movement. One example of the third category is **Nnamdi Azikiwe**.

Democratic Norms and Values

Government in Nigeria has alternated between democratic and military rule. During periods of democratic rule, Nigeria has had both parliamentary and presidential governments (Nigeria is currently a presidential system). Maintaining stable democracy has been a challenge. The frequent pattern that occurred under parliamentary government was election followed by a coup, followed by military rule and a promise to return to democracy. The majority party was able to pass its policies quite easily, and normally would funnel the resources of the state to its own ethnic group. This would lead to frustration, hostility, and frequently a coup by one or more opposing parties or ethnic groups. The presidential system has been somewhat more successful, as separation of powers is more likely to be a roadblock to the ruling party's efforts to take all. In particular, the new electoral system (discussed later) also aided in getting candidates elected to the presidency with broad popular support.

As part of the transition to democracy, General Babangida began a "Directorate for Social Mobilization" known as MAMSER (Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance) with the purpose of shaping a political culture that would be favorable to democracy. Most of the educated in Nigeria do hold democratic values and have faith in the political process.

The Role of Women

The position of women varies considerably. The Igbo and Yoruba allow women to hold jobs and elected office. In the north, Islamic law restricts the role of women in the Hausa ethnic group. Women have low literacy rates and low levels of education and employment.

Political Corruption

Political corruption in Nigeria is a serious problem. Bribes paid to public officials for a variety of services occur frequently. One of the reasons for this is that salaries for public officials are very low. Government officials have also siphoned off large sums of money from oil reserves and used it for their own personal gain. Most well known is **Sani Abacha**, whose family channeled enormous sums of money from the state and put it in private accounts abroad. Obasanjo has made routing out corruption one of his main goals with limited results.

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Political socialization in Nigeria has similar sources to that in developed countries; however, the institutions are less stable. The **family** remains the core unit of political activity in Nigeria. Tribal roles determine one's role in society. Many Nigerians have grown up in polygamous families. There are no laws that prevent a man from taking more than one wife. The **schools** play a central role in developing a sense of community. Formal education is one of the biggest benefits provided by government. Primary and secondary education is free and universal and post-secondary education opportunities have expanded. There is an education gap across regions, with the south having superior educational resources. There is a thriving independent **media** in Nigeria today. But the press has gone through periods of severe restriction. Military rulers such as Sani Abacha imposed decrees forbidding criticisms of the government and imposing harsh, often arbitrary, punishments for violators. Obasanjo reversed many of these trends and allows for freedom of speech. The **state** has the means of mass communication and organizes propaganda campaigns on issues from time to time, such as campaigns to educate citizens about democracy. Nigerian attitudes are more likely to be shaped by contact with the state. Direct contact comes from local officials. Nigerians express great cynicism about policymakers. **Religion** is another agent of socialization. Nearly 80 percent of all Nigerians belong to a formal religious organization and these effect political orientations.

POLITICAL RECRUITMENT

Most leaders in Nigeria since independence have had military background as well as university-level education. Northerners have dominated the leadership positions of Nigeria since independence. There are a large number of educated Igbos in the military who have also held leadership positions.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The Development of the Constitution of 1999

From 1983 to 1999, politics in Nigeria consisted of a succession of military regimes that planned a return to democracy. General Abubakar handed over power to a civilian regime outlined by a constitution in 1999. This is the structure of government that has existed since then.

Federalism

The number of states in Nigeria has changed several times in order to ease ethnic conflict. There were three regions in the first republic and 19 in the second. Today there are 36.

Parliamentary vs. Presidential Government

Prior to independence, the British had established a parliamentary system of government like their own. Initially Nigeria followed this pattern. But because parliamentary rule tends to yield easy results for the minority party and because the stakes of losing are so high, parliamentary government led to massive conflict and ultimately failed. The 1999 constitution provides for an independently elected president and a dual chamber national

assembly at the federal level. Each of Nigeria's 36 states has three senators, plus one for Abuja, the capitol. The number of representatives is determined by population. Senators and representatives serve four-year terms.

The Judiciary

The 1999 constitution provides for a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeal, and state and federal High Courts. Ten northern states maintain *shari'a*, or Islamic law, which has caused conflict between the overlapping court system.

INTEREST ARTICULATION

Nigeria has an active civil society. Many of the formal associations in Nigeria have an ethnic base, but there are numerous informal associations as well. Professional organizations such as unions representing petroleum workers and formal professional associations play roles in politics. An ethnic association of contemporary significance is the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni people (MOSOP), founded by Ken Sarwo Wiwa. This organization spoke for those who owned land that is now occupied by oil rigs and has seen environmental destruction. Sarwo-Wiwa was imprisoned and executed by the Abacha military dictatorship. Religious leaders also form associations in Nigeria. Associational life is most active in the south.

Associational Life

Labor unions organize and hold strikes as did the National Union of Petroleum and Gas Workers (NUPENG). Professional associations such as the Nigerian Bar Association and the Nigerian Medical Association are active. Universities are another source of political activism and were at the front of protests against military rule.

Nonassociational Groups

The **Kaduna Mafia** is an example of a nonassociational interest group. There is a network of powerful northern military leaders who maintain strong influence over military and politics and are engaged in organized crime.

Patron Client Networks

Patron client networks are active in Nigeria. Powerful political figures are able to mobilize support through personal connections with subordinates. For example, a ruler or official may give a public office to an individual client in return for loyalty in delivering political support at a lower level. Clientelism was an integral aspect of life in pre-colonial systems of the Hausa and the Yoruba.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The forms of political action that Nigerians engage in range the spectrum, from participating in violence to voting. Due to the difficulty in taking a census, it is difficult to be precise about voter turnout. Mobilization of patron client networks in voter turnout occurs.

Parties and Elections

Most importantly, the constitution was written to promote national parties and to deflect the conflict that had occurred between the ethnic groups after each election. The goal of the new constitution was to ensure that candidates for office have broad public support. It specified that to be elected president, a candidate would have to poll at least 25 percent of the votes cast in at least two-thirds of the states. Elections were to be controlled by a Federal Election Commission (FEDECO) with which all parties must register. The party had to have support from at least two-thirds of the states in order to be able to run candidates. Obasanjo was elected president under this system. From the north and a Hausa, he is Christian and his candidacy received broad popular support.

There are currently three main parties that compete in elections:

NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons) – primarily Igbo

AG (Action Group) – primarily Yoruba

NPC (Northern People's Congress) – primarily Hausa-Fulani

Ethnic Solidarity and Party Loyalty

By 1999 the party system had consolidated into three major parties. Each of the parties had a base of support from one of the three major ethnic groups; however, due to the requirements of the INEC (formerly FEDECO), each also had to have regional support. The PDP (People's Democratic Party) is said to have its support in the north, for example.

Umar Musa Yar'adua, the former northern governor, emerged as the winner of the 2007 presidential contest. The election marked the first civilian-to-civilian transfer of power in the country's history. However, power remains entrenched in the ruling PDP. International observers charged there was evidence of fraud and denial of voting rights.

POLICY FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

There are many policies that the current government is struggling with, including corruption, debt, a bureaucracy in need of retraining, continuing ethnic and religious conflict, and diseases such as AIDS.

Nigeria's public policies are greatly affected by the world community. In particular, Nigeria is part of the World Bank-supported **structural adjustment program** of "economic restructuring," which generally favors programs of privatization and low trade barriers. Both the World Bank and the IMF have been active in attempts to restructure Nigeria's mushrooming debt, which reached over \$8 billion in recent years.

Nigeria depends on its income from oil revenues. Unfortunately, oil revenue income has also been a source of political corruption. When oil revenues began to decline, corruption

and mismanagement prevented state government from being able to pay teachers and civil servants. In spite of oil revenue, Nigerians have not seen much of a change in their standard of living in recent years. Nigeria is a member of the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** and also formed **Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC)** to participate in oil production. When Nigeria became a part of these organizations the cost of oil increased, giving the federal government more revenue. Nigeria depends almost entirely on its oil revenue.

Nigerians have not seen their standard of living improve in recent years. Oil revenue has had little impact on GDP. Nigeria has a large military and spends a significant portion of its annual budget on this. This has enabled Nigeria to maintain a high profile in the region and send peacekeeping forces to neighboring countries.

Nigeria has increased the number of students in its schools, but has had poor performance in health. The income gap has increased, which was due in part to inflation that followed a rapid increase in the money supply. Governments have attempted to deal with inflation by enforcing an official exchange rate for the **naira**, Nigeria's currency. This caused foreign investment to decline, and corruption ensued. Since then the government has reduced its role in attempting to stabilize the currency.

Dealing with the Debt and Structural Adjustment

Nigeria borrowed from foreign banks heavily in the 1970s with adjustable interest rates, which eventually caused Nigeria to fall into a debt trap. Much of this debt was restructured by the World Bank and the IMF but spending to repay the debt remains the highest item in the annual federal budget. The problem of how to deal with the debt is one of the highest items of priority for the Nigerian government.

The Census Issue

Taking a census in Nigeria has led to major political conflict. This is because each ethnic group fears that the count will inaccurately reflect larger opposing groups and that the state's resources will be directed accordingly. Particularly under parliamentary rule, where the majority party could pass policies easily, this was a threat.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is true about the Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria?
 - (A) They are from the north and are Muslim.
 - (B) They are from the west and are Christian.
 - (C) They are from the south and are Muslim.
 - (D) They are from the east and are Christian.
 - (E) They attempted to secede and form an independent state.

2. Which of the following is the best reason why taking a census in Nigeria caused conflict?
 - (A) The government could not properly fund the project.
 - (B) Foreign governments caused conflicts with locals.
 - (C) The results determined the number of seats in Parliament.
 - (D) Nigerians were too uneducated to effectively complete the project.
 - (E) The debt crisis was at its peak when the project began.

3. The conflict in Biafra was an example of what?
 - (A) Ethnic-based civil war
 - (B) Coup
 - (C) Regime change
 - (D) Partisanship
 - (E) Revolution

4. What was the purpose of FEDECO in Nigeria?
 - (A) To stop campaign contributions from influencing political leaders
 - (B) To restore military rule
 - (C) To end looting of political leaders
 - (D) To make parties less regionally based
 - (E) To help with the AIDS crisis

5. Which is true about the election of the president under Nigeria's new constitution?
 - (A) The president must win a plurality of votes.
 - (B) The president is elected by the sub-national governments.
 - (C) The president must receive national and regional support.
 - (D) The president is elected using a two-ballot system.
 - (E) The president may not belong to a political party.

6. Which leader in Nigeria is known for ruling most oppressively?
 - (A) Ibrahim Babangida
 - (B) Moshood Abiola
 - (C) Sani Abacha
 - (D) Abdulsalami Abubakar
 - (E) Olesegun Obasanjo

7. All of the following are true about shari'a in Nigeria EXCEPT
 - (A) the Igbo advocate this system.
 - (B) advocates of shari'a have caused conflict in the drafting of all three constitutions in Nigeria.
 - (C) women are not allowed to vote under shari'a.
 - (D) shari'a is used in some parts of the country but not others.
 - (E) there are separate codes of conduct for women and men.

8. Which of the following best describes patron-client politics in Nigeria?
- (A) Corrupt lootocrats raise taxes and build palaces.
 - (B) There is a lack of legitimacy among both the elite and working class.
 - (C) Nigerian leaders are dependent and people reward each other through mutual support.
 - (D) Indirect rule set up a hierarchy that still causes conflict.
 - (E) It is the primary source of political recruitment.
9. Which party does Obasanjo associate himself with?
- (A) People's Democratic Party
 - (B) All People's Party
 - (C) Alliance for Democracy
 - (D) National Party of Nigeria
10. How many states does Nigeria have today?
- (A) 12 (C) 36 (E) 75
 - (B) 19 (D) 50

Short Answer Questions

1. Define **patron client** networks and give an example of how these work in Nigeria.
2. Define **ethnic cleavages** and identify the three main ethnic cleavages in Nigeria.

Conceptual Free-Response Question

Ethnic conflict can be a problem for a political system. Discuss how the government of Nigeria has dealt with ethnic conflict and how the current Russian government has dealt with ethnic conflict. In your discussion, do each of the following:

- (A) describe the nature of the ethnic conflict in each country
- (B) identify one principal method used by Nigeria and one principal method used by Russia to resolve ethnic conflict
- (C) assess the impact of each government's response to ethnic conflict on political stability within the country

ANSWERS and EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. (A) The Hausa-Fulani are one of the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are from the north and are Muslim.
2. (C) When a census was taken in Nigeria, war erupted as ethnic groups feared that Parliament would funnel the state resources to the opposing group.
3. (A) The state of Biafra (Igbo-dominated) attempted to secede in order to control the oil reserves in its area and to keep the profits from those reserves from going to other groups.

4. (D) FEDECO stands for Federal Election Commission. It established filing requirements for political parties, with the main goal of making the parties regionally and not ethnically based.
5. (C) FEDECO requires that presidential candidates have regional as well as national support.
6. (C) Sani Abacha by far was the most oppressive military ruler in Nigeria.
7. (A) The Igbo are a Christian ethnic group. The Yoruba in the north use shari'a.
8. (C) In a patron-client system, there are rewards done for political favors.
9. (A) The People's Democratic Party is Obasanjo's party.
10. (C) There have been several numbers of states in Nigeria but the current number is 36.

Short Answer Questions

1. *Patron-client networks are relationships between a higher-up individual (patron) and a subordinate individual (client). Each benefits from the relationship as political favors are given by the patron (such as distributing social services) in return for support from the client (such as a vote). In Nigeria such relationships exist between elected officials (patrons) and citizens (clients). An elected official may promise benefits to citizens in a district in exchange for their vote.*
2. *Ethnic cleavages are differences or divisions in the characteristics of a population. In Nigeria the three main ethnic cleavages are the Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo, and the Yoruba.*

Conceptual Free-Response Question

(A) *Ethnic conflict in Nigeria has differences as well as similarities from ethnic conflict in Russia. In Nigeria, there are hundreds of ethnic groups, and conflict occurs over religion as well as economic status and traditions (in Nigeria the northern part of the country is dominated by the Hausa, a Muslim group, while the rest of the country is dominated by groups that practice Christianity or traditional beliefs). In Russia there are not as many ethnic groups as there are in Nigeria. One source of ethnic conflict is the Chechens, a Muslim ethnic group that lives predominately in the southern part of Russia.*

(B) *One method used by the Nigerian government to reduce ethnic conflict is the requirement that political parties have broad popular support. This is done by FEDECO, a commission that requires that presidential candidates have support from a variety of regions. The Russian government tried to reduce ethnic conflict by holding a referendum on Chechen independence. The referendum failed, however, which may have been influenced by the fact that President Putin did not favor the referendum's success and used the state media to run advertisements against its success.*

(C) *Both countries have had moderate success with their attempts to ease ethnic conflict. In Nigeria, Obasanjo was elected using the rules established by FEDECO, and he has been popular with a variety of groups. On the other hand, ethnic conflict in Nigeria continues. Just recently, a group of petroleum workers was kidnapped and held hostage by one ethnic group, for example. In Russia, the referendum on Chechen independence failed, and while there has not been a violent conflict recently, there are still calls for greater autonomy for the Chechen people.*