

Nigeria a political review



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Nigeria is named after the Niger River. A British journalist in the 1890s named Flora Shaw suggested the name because of the river was a dominant presence in region and the name was accepted as the official name of those territories in the Niger Region. (ANYANWU) The country can be divided into three regions that include the forest lands in the south, the Sudan savanna in the north, and the Middle Belt, in between. Nigeria has an extensive geographic size, with a large degree of ecological, economic, and cultural variations. Today, The Federal Republic of Nigeria has a diverse ethnic population of over 130 billion people. It is one of the most populous countries in Africa. Nigeria contains over 250 ethnic groups and many are divided into further subgroups. The official language of Nigeria is English but there are ethno linguistic categories that can be differentiated by sub regions of Nigeria these languages are: Hausa and Fulani in north, Yoruba in southwest, and Igbo in southeast and also Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, and Ijaw. These ethnic groups play an important role in the social and political framework of the country as traditional customs and ethnic loyalties have divided the country since its inception. Nigerian history is diverse and in order to understand the divergence of cultures and political instability in the region it is necessary to understand in context the dominant issues that are the basis for the political process and the underlying issues associated with Nigerian society and the political framework of the region. (ANYANWU) In the early 1800's in the northern part of Nigeria the Sokoto Caliphate brought most of that region under Islamic rule. Even today it is evident that the Islamic religions and control is in the northern regions of Nigeria. The spread of Islam is a significant factor that explains the divisions that are seen today between the northern and southern portions of Nigeria. When Nigeria became a colony

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the spread of western education and Christianity in the south caused a disparity as development was much slower in the north. This disparity in education and development would later cause conflict between the two regions. While the slave trade played a factor in the identity of Nigeria as more than 3.5 million people were forced into slavery it was those converts to Islam and the spread of Christianity that began to promote political and cultural independence. One of the most significant factors of Nigerian political and social history was when the region became one of the British colonies. In 1861 Britain annexed the county of Lagos and then later during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 the territories surrounding the Niger River became a British possession and was under the colonial rule of the British during the second half of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century. The impact that British colonization had on the region was significant in that they introduced the basic standards for law and order, western education, religion and the English Language. The introduction of these concepts gave and promoted the foundation for the political framework of the country that is affected even today. (ANYANWU) During British colonization the Nigerian people were left out of the large scale political process. The colonist attitude towards the Nigerian people was paternalistic in nature. Huxley describes their attitudes as the following: The reluctance of a maturer mind to allow those of less mature judgment the freedom to err. And this reluctance is intensified when the mature man has a sense of responsibility for the immature, and still more intensified when he is fond of them, proud of them, anxious for their success, or in any other way emotionally concerned about them. It is, in fact, the same influence which makes it difficult for parents to let their children alone, and to prefer for

them a safe, uneventful, but repressed and incomplete development to a more vital salvation attained through pain and pride and ambition of the white man in loco parentis to the black, should not be allowed to defeat their own ends" (Huxley) In 1914, Lord Frederick Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern parts of into a single territory. Nigeria was divided for administrative purposes into four areas of administrative control: the northern, eastern and western provinces, and the colony of Lagos. The development of two echelons of government emerged with the division that was key to the British control of the Nigerian Colony. The two were that of a centralized government and a native local government. (ANYANWU) Nigeria was administered between 1914 and 1922 by a Governor General. The Governor General was responsible for the central form of government as they oversaw the large scale government processes and communicated with British leaders in Britain but had little interaction with the people. The local administration was more responsive to the native populace and is where Nigerians were exposed to colonial authority. The local administrative control of these areas encompassed the idea of "indirect rule". The local government practices were led by local tribal chiefs or native leaders as selected by the British officers. Essentially the natives were figure heads. (ANYANWU) In 1954 a constitution was created and it established a new federal form of self government for Nigeria. The constitution extended the functions of the local regional administrations introducing an in depth form of government. Local and native leaders called for independence and played key roles in the formation of the constitution most important were Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Herbert Macaulay, leaders of the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC). In 1957 a conference regarding the first

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established constitution decided a form of self government for the Eastern and Western regions of Nigeria and then in 1959 self government was established for the North. Once self-government was established in these regions the road to independence was opened. On 1 October 1960, Nigeria gained independence and on 1 October 1963 it became a republic. The first elected president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe one of the key activists involved in the Nigerian independence movement. (WEB) While the election of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe marked a turning point in Nigeria's political independence there existed substantial issues within the ethnic population of Nigeria. The dissatisfaction with ethnic representation sparked the creation of various political groups and political alliances this in turn caused internal turmoil as various factions grappled for recognition and power within the newly established government. The period between 1966 to 1979 was personified by military coups, civil unrest, military takeovers and a deadly civil war. (CHARLE) Ethnic divisions and social unrest and dissatisfaction with the government culminated in a military coup on 15 January 1966. General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi led a group of Army officers and assassinated the prime minister taking control of the regional and national government. General Aguiyi-Ironsi eliminated the federal system of government and replaced it with a more centralized form of government. General Aguiyi-Ironsi was of Igbo ethnicity and thus appointed many Igbo's in positions of prominence within his cabinet. This caused unrest and precipitated civil unrest resulting in the killing of many of the Igbo people. That same year some Northern officers revolted against General Aguiyi-Ironsi's government and killed him and then General Yakubu Gowon was appointed the leader of the military led government. (CHARLE) General

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Gowon split the four regions of Nigeria into twelve separate states. The decision to divide the eastern region touched off one of the most deadly civil wars in Nigerian history. In May 1967, the Biafran civil war began. Due to national rivalries and ethnic pressures the military governor of the Eastern Region, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu declared the secession and independence of the Eastern Region and named it the ' Republic of Biafra'. Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu refused to accept the division proposed by General Gowon. The civil war between Biafra and the remainder of Nigeria continued until Biafra surrendered on January 15, 1970. Military casualties reached an estimated 1, 000, 0000 this number does not include the many civilians that died as a result of starvation due largely in part to a federal blockade. (CHARLE) The military has dominated the political landscape of Nigeria for over 30 years. There have been various attempts at civilianizing the government. While there have been attempts at establishing civilian government they have inevitably failed. In his 1 October 1979 inaugural address, President Shagari declared I will continue to advance and defend the cause of our great country before the world community of nations. It is our national will that Africa shall remain the cornerstone of our foreign policy. Also it is our national will that Africa shall be free-of racial bigotry, free of oppression, and free from the vestiges of colonialism. My government is determined to see the cause of justice and human decency prevail in Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. We shall continue to support all forces of progress and oppose all forces of oppression in Africa and elsewhere. I hereby reaffirm our faith and support for the Charter of the United Nations and the universal declaration of human rights, the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, the Economic Community of West African

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States, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Our watchword shall always be the advancement of mankind and the enhancement of the cause of peace, prosperity and progress through mutual respect and cooperation between nations. (Stremlau) Civilian forms of government attempted to take hold of the government and were elected into power in 1965 and in 1983 but these attempts at civilianizing the government failed in the face of military intervention. Coups and takeovers eventually ousted these civilian led administrations. Nigeria has slowly implemented the democratic process over the span of its inception but the decisive factor to the emergence of the democratic process and political stability will be whether it has the ability to retain an enduring civilian based form of government given its history of military intervention. Today Nigeria is a Federal Republic with 36 States and a Capital Territory. The President is elected for a four year term which is only one chance for reelection. The legislature is Bi-camera and comprises of a 109- member Senate and a 360- member House of Representatives that is called the National Assembly. When combined the National Assembly is very similar to the functions of the United States Congress. The Legislature can be found at both the Federal and State levels. (WEB) The Federal level consists of the President, the Vice-president and members of the Federal Executive Council, while at the State level, it is made up of the Governor, the Deputy Governor and other members of the State Executive Council. Similar to the president these members are elected on a four year term and can only be reelected once. (WEB) The ability to sustain a stable government is essential to the economic and social growth of Nigeria. The current political system established in Nigeria is based on the United States System of government. The United

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States and Nigerians share similar backgrounds in the struggle for democratic ideals and freedom. Both the U. S and the Nigerians were colonized by the British and while the United States was more of a violent turn over than the peace full transition of that of the Nigerians the similarities in their political struggle to establish a democratic form of government can be somewhat comparative. (NWACHUKU) In the early stages of the formation of the Nigerian Government there was actually a proposal to create 45 states while it was not instituted the proposal is an indication of how much the Nigerians want to emulate the United States political system. Members from the Nigerian National Assembly also visited the United States to determine the functions of the government within a federal system. The first efforts at civilian form of federal government were based on the presidential form of government that exists in the United States. While these efforts failed in large part due to the ethnic divergences and political instability Nigeria has tried to adapt United States government functions and policy within the framework of their political process. The relationship between Nigeria and the United states while similar in democratic structure is based in large to how the United States contributes economically to Nigeria. Nigeria has supplied 15% of the oil that is consumed in the United States. In 1980, Nigeria was the second largest supplier of crude oil to the United States. There is a \$13 Billion trade deficit between the two countries. . (NWACHUKU) The relationship between the United States and Nigeria has had some transformation over the course of the political instability demonstrated by Nigeria. Since 1977 the Carter administration has sought Nigeria's help and goodwill in furthering many aspects of America's Africa policy. (Stremlau) While the United States has favored the

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Nigerian political process towards democracy it was somewhat reluctant to intervene in the civilian conflicts especially being that of their civil war.

During the Civil war though the United States did provide humanitarian aid to the former " Biafra" because of the degree of starvation during the federal blockage of aid. While this move by the United States was greeted with some skepticism by the Nigerian government at that time this act of humanitarian assistance did not sever their relationship. When the war did end it was United States organizations who donated more than 1 million dollars in aid towards the reconstruction of the social and economic consequences of the civil war. (NWACHUKU) In his inaugural address President Kennedy (1962) said, To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help themselves for whatever period is required . . . not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich. . (NWACHUKU) Works Cited Anyanwu, K C. " The Bases of Political Instability in Nigeria." *Journal of Black Studies* 13 (1982): 101-117. JSTOR. SAN MARCOS. 22 Nov. 2007. Charle, Edwin G. " English Colonial Policy and Economy in Nigeria." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 26 (1967): 79-92. JSTOR. SAN MARCOS. " History and People." Nigerian Embassy. 28 NOV 2007 . Huxley, J. " African View." Chatto and Windus (1933). Nwachuku, Levi. " The United States and Nigeria." *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (1998): 575-593. JSTOR. SAN MARCOS 28 NOV. 2007. Stremlau, John. " The Fundamentals of Nigerian Foreign Policy." *A Journal of Opinion* 11 (1981): 46-50. JSTOR. SAN MARCOS. 25 NOV. 2007.