

Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview

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Nigeria

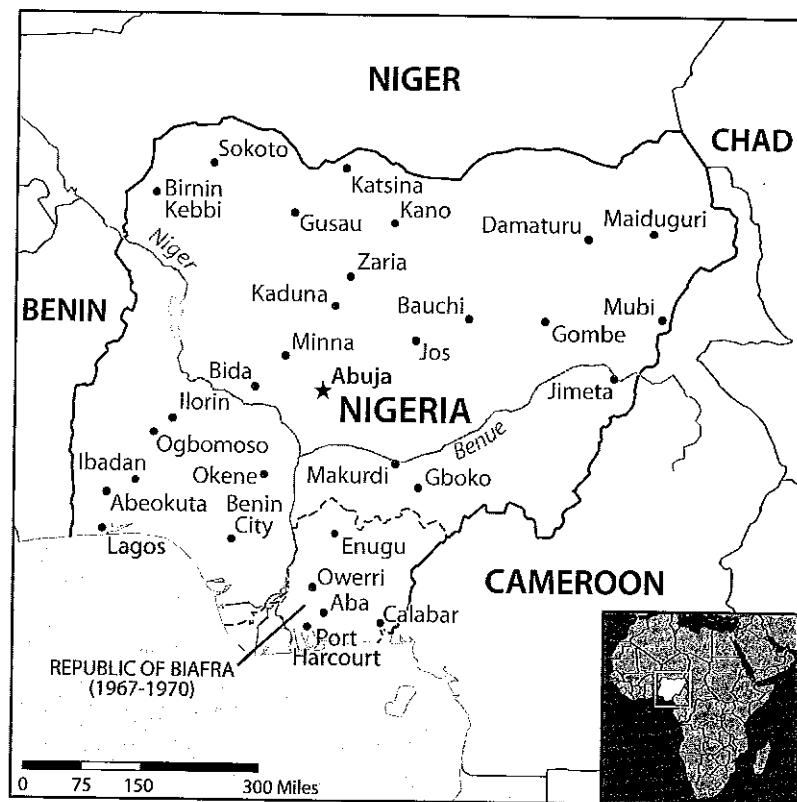
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Chronology

- 1900 Britain establishes colonial rule over the Niger Coast Protectorate, previously under chartered company rule.
- 1914 Britain consolidates its hold over Nigeria with the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates. This brings the predominantly Muslim North and the Christian and animist South under a single colonial administration.
- 1924 The first indigenous political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) is formed.
- 1960 Nigeria gains independence from Britain with Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa leading a coalition government.
- 1966 Ethnic and political conflicts lead to a military coup in which the elected civilian government is overthrown.
- 1967 Eastern states dominated by the Igbo ethnic group secede from Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra, sparking a bloody civil war.
- 1970 Biafran leaders surrender; the former Biafran regions are reintegrated into the country.
- 1976 The nationalist military ruler Gen. Murtala Mohammed is assassinated in coup attempt. He is replaced by Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, who introduces an American-style presidential constitution.
- 1979 The new constitution is introduced with the "federal character principle," an affirmative action principle aimed at ensuring equitable distribution of national resources. Elections bring a new civilian government to power.
- 1984 The military regime of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari launches the "War Against Indiscipline," an ambitious national campaign to mobilize the country that stresses the work ethic and emphasizes patriotism.
- 1993 Military ruler general Ibrahim Babangida annuls the results of presidential election following an extended and controversial democratic transition program.
- 1999 Transition from military dictatorship to democratic rule. Former military ruler, Olusegun Obasanjo is elected president.
- 2003 President Olusegun Obasanjo is reelected president for a second term.

Situating the Nation

The foundations of contemporary Nigerian nationalism can be traced to 19th-century European imperialism in Africa. Until it gained independence in 1960, Nigeria was a British colony and nationalist activities during this period focused mainly on challenging colonial domination and ending British rule. With the attainment of independence, Nigerian nationalism began to focus more on fostering national integration and a sense of national identity among Nigerians. The main thrust of postcolonial nationalism was establishing a cohesive nation out of



about 200 constituent ethnic groups in the country. The largest of these ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo.

The origin of the Nigerian state dates back to 1900 when the British government took over the administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate that was previously under chartered company rule and formed the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria. In 1914, the British government amalgamated both protectorates to formally establish the colonial state of Nigeria. Colonial efforts at creating a Nigerian nation were fraught with many challenges. The most significant of these were the cultural and religious differences between the predominantly Muslim North and the Christian and animist South. For most of the colonial period, the British administration maintained a policy of divide and rule that sought to keep the prevalent Western Christian influences of the South from the Muslim North where appeals to Islamic legitimacy upheld the rule of the emirs. The policy of indirect rule was aimed at preserving the indigenous cultures of each area. Yet, the bringing together of various ethnic and religious groups under a common colonial administrative unit fostered a spirit of oneness and some sense of unity.

This sense of unity was strengthened by the desire for self-rule and freedom from foreign control, which gave rise to an organized nationalist movement soon after the imposition of colonial rule. At the forefront of this early anticolonial nationalist movement was an emergent class of Western-educated Nigerians, many

of whom were products of Christian missionary schools in the South. Like colonial rule elsewhere in Africa, British colonial rule carried with it racial intolerance and discrimination that limited the opportunities of Nigerians, particularly the intelligentsia in political and economic life. Colonial policies that excluded Africans from important political positions in the state affected all Nigerians, irrespective of their ethnic origins, and helped them to see themselves not as separate ethnic entities but a marginalized group collectively in opposition to British colonialism. This became the basis of the early nationalist movement.

Instituting the Nation

The first group of anticolonial Nigerian nationalists emerged in the South. These nationalists opposed the British policy of indirect rule, which entrenched what was considered to be an anachronistic traditional ruling class in power while shutting out the Westernized elite. The nationalist organizations they led aimed to mobilize not only a particular class or group but also the entire nation against what they saw as oppressive British rule. The ideological inspiration for many of these early nationalists came from different sources, including prominent American and Europe-based pan-Africanists, such as Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and George Padmore. Inspiration also came from Nigerian students abroad who joined those from other colonies to form such nationalist and pan-African groups as the West African Students Union, founded in London in 1925.

One of the first nationalist organizations in the country was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). Although there were several nationalist-oriented political movements before it, its formation in 1923 marked the emergence of organized political parties in Nigeria. A central figure in its formation was Herbert Macaulay, a former civil servant and newspaper publisher who became a dominant figure in post-World War I Nigerian politics. By the 1930s, Macaulay had gained a reputation as the leading symbol of the anticolonial nationalist movement. His central demand was greater representation and participation of Nigerians in the colonial government. He was also strongly opposed to colonial racial discrimination and segregation. The chief sources of Macaulay's strength and mobilizing power were his newspaper, the *Lagos Daily News*; his party, the NNDP; the highly organized labor unions in the South; and his unique ability to fire the imagination of semiliterate and illiterate masses of the country. His fiery public speeches and newspaper commentaries appealed to both educated elites and chiefly authorities. Under his leadership, the NNDP emerged as the most powerful group and a major political force in Nigeria in the 1930s. However, like most first-generation West African nationalists, Macaulay was conservative in his approach. Although he was deeply critical of British imperial policies, he also at times demonstrated great loyalty to the British Crown and devotion to the

Herbert Macaulay

Herbert Macaulay was a pioneer of the Nigerian nationalist movement. Trained as a civil engineer in England, he established the first Nigerian political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party, which successfully contested and won seats in the colonial Legislative Council. He was a leading campaigner for the welfare of Nigerians and gained a reputation for his principled opposition to the excesses of the colonial government. He is often described as the "father of Nigerian nationalism."

British cause. He did not quarrel with the goal of British policy in Nigeria but with specific actions and policies of the colonial administration. This seeming paradox in Macaulay's political beliefs was seen by some of his contemporaries as a limitation of his political vision for Nigeria. Many believed that his loyalty to Britain compromised his nationalist activities.

Such concerns paved the way for a new phase of nationalism in the 1940s with the emergence of a new breed of men (and a few women) who were more radical in their opposition to colonialism. These men, many of whom had been trained in England and the United States, and had therefore been more intensely and directly exposed to the Atlantic race discourse, came back to their country to right what they regarded as historic wrongs by the Europeans against African peoples. This new phase in the nationalist movement in Nigeria was inaugurated with the formation of the Lagos Youth Movement (later, Nigerian Youth Movement, or NYM) in 1934, which embraced most of the young intellectuals of the period—H. O. Davis, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Olufemi Vaughan, Kofo Abayomi, and Obafemi Awolowo. The NYM proclaimed as its political goal the "immediate and complete independence of Nigeria from British colonial rule." Yet, it also agitated for dominion status within the British Commonwealth of Nations so that Nigeria would have the same status as Canada and Australia. Although the NYM represented a departure from the conservative nationalism of the past, it did not have the mobilizing power of Macaulay's NNNDP. A split in the ranks of the organization in 1941 led to the formation of two political organizations that subsequently dominated the nationalist movement—the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and the Action Group (AG) led by Obafemi Awolowo.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was born in 1904 and educated in Nigeria and the United States. In 1937, he founded a newspaper, the *West African Pilot*, and later cofounded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, a major political party that dominated Nigerian politics in the 1940s and 1950s. He was elected premier of the Eastern Region in 1952 and served as governor general and later president of Nigeria between 1960 and 1966.

The outbreak of World War II strengthened the nationalist movement. Leaders of the nationalist movement sought to link local nationalist aspirations with global issues associated with the war. Allied propaganda that the war against Germany was being fought to preserve democracy and to ensure that people in every part of the world live in freedom and peace, provided a basis for Nigerians to demand that these same ideals be extended to them. British wartime assurances to improve the welfare of colonized people, which were made as a way of securing their support for British war efforts, were also used by Nigerian elites to press their demand for political reforms. They charged that colonial rule prevented the unshackling of progressive forces in the country and demanded immediate self-government.

This more radical phase of Nigerian nationalism was also marked by numerous protests of postwar political and economic conditions. Prominent among these were the agitations of Nigerian ex-soldiers and trade union leaders who led popular protests against the economic hardships that Nigerians faced after the war. During the war, Nigerian soldiers fought alongside other British forces in Palestine, Morocco, and Burma. Wartime experiences provided a new frame of reference for many of these soldiers, who interacted across ethnic boundaries in ways that were unusual in Nigeria. This experience engendered a unique sense of unity and nationalism among the soldiers. Besides, many of these soldiers who returned home after the war had learned skills and trades in the army that they found difficult to apply after the war. Demobilized and unemployed, they felt that the colonial government had not given them a fair deal in spite of their contributions to the war efforts. These soldiers, returning from theaters of war, brought back with them dreams of national self-expression and became very active in the nationalist movement.

At the same time, the increase in the spread of education swelled the ranks of the middle class, leading to the emergence in the late 1940s of a vibrant nationalist newspaper press and organized labor union movement. The most active of the unions was the Railway Workers Union under the leadership of Michael Imoudu who organized a successful national workers strike in 1945. Many of these workers and trade union leaders were exposed to nationalist propaganda and became increasingly involved in nationalist politics. Under these domestic and international circumstances that challenged the legitimacy of colonial rule, Britain began to re-appraise Nigeria's political future, paving the way for the country's independence.

Defining the Nation

In the period leading up to independence in 1960, the nationalist movement began to assume a more ethnic and regional character. The new political parties that emerged placed greater emphasis on regional and ethnic concerns rather than on national interests. For instance, the AG evolved from Egbe Omo Oduduwa

(Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa), a Yoruba cultural movement in 1948. The latter had as one of its main objectives, "the inculcation of the idea of a single nationalism throughout Yoruba land." The founders of the party openly declared it to be a regional party aimed at organizing within its fold all nationalities in the Western Yoruba-dominated region of Nigeria. Similarly, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was a purely Northern political party, dominated by the Muslim Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. The membership of the party was limited to people from the Northern region and its declared objective was to seek regional autonomy within Nigeria. The third major party was the Igbo-dominated NCNC (later the National Council of Nigerian Citizens).

Although these regionalist parties jointly negotiated with the British government over constitutional changes leading up to independence, cooperation among them was the result of expediency rather than an emerging sense of national unity. For the most part, political groups articulated their political aspirations on the basis of regional, rather than national, interests. Once it became evident that political independence was within reach, the tenuous sense of national unity and consensus that had sustained the anticolonial movement gave way to rigidly parochial ethnic and regional interests. In championing their various regional causes, some political leaders even questioned the viability and desirability of a Nigerian nation. Ahmadu Bello, the leader of the NPC, characterized the British amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 as a mistake, while Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the AG, famously stated:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English," "Welsh," or "French." The word "Nigerian" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not. (Awolowo 1947, 48)

With growing regional sentiments among the dominant ethnic groups, leaders of minority ethnic groups began to demand either for separate states of their own or for constitutional safeguards to prevent their domination by majority ethnic groups in an independent Nigeria. The concerns were based on the fact that the major regional parties were effectively controlled by leaders of the numerically dominant ethnic/cultural groups—the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbo.

Obafemi Awolowo

Obafemi Awolowo was a foremost Nigerian nationalist and political leader. Trained as a lawyer, he became involved in politics in the 1940s and organized the Action Group in 1951. He was elected premier of Western Nigeria in 1954 and later became the opposition leader in the national parliament. During the civil war he served as the federal commissioner for Finance and deputy chairman of the Federal Executive Council. In 1979, he ran unsuccessfully for president. He died in 1987.

Minority groups were concerned that independence from British colonial rule would only be replaced by permanent Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, or Igbo domination.

To address these concerns, the British colonial government established a commission in 1957 to ascertain the facts about the fears of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria and to propose means of allaying those fears. In its report, the commission identified two main grounds for the fears of suppression and political marginalization among minority ethnic groups in the country. First was the use of physical force by the major political parties to intimidate smaller political groups. In the view of the commission, this trend was a grave threat to national integration and inter-ethnic harmony. A second reason for the fears of the minority groups was the tendency of regional governments, secure in their majority, to disregard the wishes of the minorities. But in spite of these observations, the commission rejected the idea of creating more states because it thought that would "create more problems as great as it sought to cure." It suggested instead that a "Bill of Rights" modeled after the European Convention on Human Rights be included in the independence constitution as a way of promoting national integration and guaranteeing minority rights. Following this recommendation, the constitution introduced at independence contained elaborate provisions guaranteeing to every Nigerian certain basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Narrating the Nation

Although Nigeria became independent in 1960, it retained formal links with the British Crown until 1963 when the country became a Republic. With independence, Nigeria also adopted a federal form of government. This was thought to be the best form of government for a country with such diverse regional and ethnic groups. Federalism, which guaranteed some level of regional autonomy, was also seen as a way of protecting the rights and interests of minority groups within the country. The country also adopted the Westminster style of government as a way of ensuring that political power was not concentrated in the hands of any single ethnic or regional group. Thus, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, from the Muslim-dominated Hausa-Fulani group, became the prime minister; Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo from the East, became governor general (later president); and Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba from the West, became leader of the opposition party in parliament.

Under these circumstances, postcolonial Nigerian nationalism tended to focus on promoting a shared sense of national belonging. Old colonial histories that stressed ethnic divisions and cultural disparities were rejected for new national histories that stressed national unity. Nationalist historians challenged the idea that the Nigerian state was an artificial colonial creation and stressed, instead, the long history of precolonial economic and cultural contacts between the diverse ethnic groups in the country. The underlying message was that there were cultural and historical bases for national unity.



Nigerian coat of arms. (Vector-Images.com)

The aspiration toward national integration was also evident in some of the national symbols that were adopted at independence. The national anthem, composed by a British expatriate, acknowledged ethnic differences but stressed national unity: "Nigeria, we hail thee/ Our own dear native land/ Though tribe and tongue may differ/ In brotherhood we stand." Similarly, the new national motto and coat of arms evoked unity by incorporating symbols that connected the land and people of Nigeria. The coat of arms consisted of wavy bands of silver on a black shield representing the Niger and Benue rivers, two major rivers that run across the country. It also included the *Cactus spectabilis*, a wild flower common throughout the country. The adopted national motto was "Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress."

Mobilizing and Building the Nation

Beneath these national symbols, however, were serious challenges to the idea of the Nigerian nation. Ethnic and regional differences were accentuated in the

struggle for economic power and limited state resources. In the absence of a truly national political platform, politicians drew on ethnic and regional loyalties in staking their claim to national office. Even supposedly national institutions such as the military and the police were not spared the divisive ethnic politics of this period. In 1966, the military overthrew the elected government of Tafawa Balewa in a coup led by Igbo officers in the Nigerian Army. The coup led to the assassinations of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa and the Northern Premier Ahmadu Bello, leading many to conclude that it was ethnically motivated. The new military ruler, Maj. Gen. Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo, sought to stem the tide of ethnicity and regionalism in Nigerian politics by abrogating the federal system and introducing a unitary system of government. His hope was that by centralizing political power, the regional governments would cease to be bases of ethnic agitations. This reform was short-lived as Aguiyi Ironsi was himself overthrown in a bloody countercoup by military officers, mostly of Northern extraction. Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon was named as the new head of state amidst the violence and killings of Igbos in the northern part of the country. These killings were apparently to avenge the assassination of Northern political office holders during the earlier Igbo-led coup.

The killing of Igbos led to the mass departure of over a million Igbos from the North back to their homelands in the Eastern Region. It also led to calls in the Eastern Region for secession from Nigeria, as several Igbo leaders proclaimed that they had lost faith in the Nigerian nation. In May 1967, Lt. Col. Chukwue-meka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military governor of the Eastern Region, proclaimed the establishment of the independent Republic of Biafra. This led to a devastating civil war from 1967 to 1970. The Biafra War was the most serious threat to the Nigerian nation since its creation. Leaders of other ethnic groups made it clear that they too would seek secession if the Biafran secessionist movement was successful. This scenario was, however, averted with the surrender of Biafran forces in 1970.

One of the main challenges that faced the country after the civil war was restoring confidence in the nation, which had been shaken by the conflict. The military rulers realized that there was an urgent need to repair the damage of war and to foster a renewed sense of national belonging, particularly among the Igbos

Biafra War

The Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Biafra War) broke out in 1967 following political and ethnic crisis in the country. The Eastern states dominated by the Igbo ethnic group under the leadership of Lt. Col. C. O. Ojukwu declared the Eastern Region the sovereign and independent Republic of Biafra. The federal government declared a state emergency, and the ensuing fighting raged until 1970 when Ojukwu fled the country and Biafran forces surrendered. One million Nigerians died in the war.

who had lost the war. To this end, the government of Gen. Yakubu Gowon declared the official principle of "No victor, No vanquished," indicating that there would be no retribution against leaders of the secessionist movement. No military medals of valor were awarded to the victorious federal troops since, as General Gowon argued, the war had been a conflict between brothers. Instead, the government promised to adopt the policy of the three R's: rehabilitation, reconciliation, and reconstruction. Efforts were made to rebuild infrastructure destroyed during the war and reintegrate Igbos into national institutions, such as the civil service, the police force, and the army. Although these postwar reconstruction initiatives had their limitations, they represented an attempt at promoting national integration.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Nigeria continued to be ruled by a succession of military rulers. The most prominent of these was Brig. (later Gen.) Murtala Ramat Mohammed, a Muslim Northerner, who came to power in 1975. Mohammed assumed power with an agenda to reform key institutions of the state and foster a new sense of national belonging among Nigerians. This included a purge that affected the civil service, judiciary, armed forces, and public corporations. He strengthened the power of the central government and imposed the authority of the federal government in areas formerly reserved for the states. His successor, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, continued with these reformist policies and oversaw the transition from military rule to elected civilian rule in the country.

One of the tasks of nation-building that the Mohammed-Obasanjo regime grappled with was formulating new political institutions, processes, and orientations that would address the problem of ethnic and regional politics that had plagued the nation since independence. One solution was to divide the country into more states to reduce the concentration of ethnic groups in particular states. It was thought that this would "help to erase memories of past political ties and emotional attachments." Thus, in 1976, 6 new states were created, bringing the number of states in the country from 13 to 19. Also, as part of reforming political structures to foster national integration, the country adopted the American-style presidential system of government and a new constitution in 1979. Under the constitution, parties applying for registration had to have national objectives and executive boards whose members represented at least two-thirds of the states. This was clearly aimed at avoiding the divisive ethnic and regional politics of the past. Another provision of the 1979 constitution aimed at eliminating past loopholes was the "federal character principle." This was an affirmative action principle requiring that appointments to top government positions be made to reflect the regional and ethnic diversity of the country. This principle also applied to the composition of the armed forces and the distribution of national resources.

Apart from the federal character principle, other initiatives taken by the Mohammed-Obasanjo regime that were aimed at promoting national integration included the adoption of a new national anthem composed by a Nigerian to replace the old nation anthem handed down from the colonial period. Unlike the

old anthem, the new anthem made no reference to ethnic differences but, rather, emphasized faith in the fatherland and the labors of past heroes: "Arise, O compatriots/ Nigeria's call obey/ To serve our fatherland/ With love and strength and faith/ The labor of our heroes past/ Shall never be in vain." The government also launched a public-awareness campaign that promoted patriotism and pride in Nigerian culture. Public officers were encouraged to dress in local attire rather than Western cloths, particularly when representing the country abroad. It became common to see Nigerian public officials dressed in flowing traditional gowns known as *Agbada*. The assassination of Gen. Murtala Mohammed in an unsuccessful coup d'état in 1976 provided a rare moment of national unity in the country with the outpouring of national loss. Although Gen. Mohammed was a Muslim Northerner, his political and social reforms won him popular admiration and support throughout the country. His decisive leadership seemed to promise a bright future and many saw him as a national hero. Several national monuments were subsequently built or named in his honor, and his image adorns the national currency.

In the 1980s, Nigeria was ruled by a combination of military and elected civilian regimes, all of which adopted policies aimed at promoting national unity and a sense of patriotism in the country. The elected civilian government of Shehu Shagari, which succeeded the military government in 1979, strove to ensure that each region of the country was represented in public appointments in accordance with the federal character principle in the constitution. Similarly in 1984, the military regime headed by Gen. Muhammadu Buhari launched an ambitious national campaign to mobilize the country. The military-style initiative, which it called the "War Against Indiscipline," stressed the work ethic, emphasized patriotism, decried corruption, and promoted environmental sanitation. In government-sponsored media campaigns throughout the country, Nigerians were encouraged to take pride in their country and eschew the ethnic animosities of the past. Daily recitals of the national anthem were made compulsory in schools, and public institutions were mandated to fly the national flag to demonstrate their patriotism. Although this campaign for reform and national mobilization created an unprecedented awareness of the importance of national symbols like the flag and anthem, it met

Gen. Murtala Ramat Mohammed (1938–1976)

Gen. Murtala Mohammed, an army general and later head of state, was born in 1938. He received his military training in Nigeria and England and was a commanding officer during the Nigerian Civil War. Following a military coup in 1975, he was named head of state. His dynamic administration gave this country a new sense of direction, duty, and patriotism. He pursued a radical program of reforming major national institutions and outlined a democratic transition program. He was assassinated on February 13, 1976, in an abortive coup.

few of its aims. An economic recession coupled with the authoritarian character of the regime undermined the efforts at promoting patriotism and national integration. Sporadic conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the northern part of the country also seemed to undermine the message of national unity.

Like several other African countries, Nigeria was caught in the wave of democratization that swept across the world in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Its military rulers came under sustained international and domestic pressure to restore democratic constitutional rule in the country. Between 1989 and 1993, the military ruler general Ibrahim Babangida oversaw an extended and controversial transition program aimed at terminating military rule and restoring the country to full democracy. The Babangida regime stressed the need for a democratic system of government that was suited to the geopolitical and multiethnic realities of Nigeria. It was repeatedly argued that Nigerian democracy had to be "home grown" and need not be modeled after Western democracies. Although the country's previous experimentation with the Westminster style of government had indeed been unsuccessful, the argument for a "home grown" democracy was often an excuse for excessive government intervention in the democratic transition process. For example, participation in the democratic process was limited to two national political parties established by the government. The justification for this was that by limiting political participation to two national political parties, the nation would avoid a repeat of the divisive ethnic and regional politics that marred previous attempts at democratic rule.

This democratic transition program ended in a fiasco in 1993 when General Babangida abruptly annulled a presidential election that was widely believed to have been won by Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba businessman from the southern part of the country. The country was thrown into political and social turmoil, particularly in the South where the annulment of the election was seen as an attempt by a military regime dominated by Northerners to prevent a shift in political power to the South. This political situation intensified ethnic and regional tensions across the country for much of the 1990s as the military struggled to maintain its hold on power amidst growing opposition. However, following the death of the military ruler general Sani Abacha in 1998, the military leadership inaugurated a new, more transparent democratic transition program that sought to open up the political space by encouraging mass participation. The two national political parties established by the previous government were abolished and multiparty politics was reintroduced. Old arguments about the need for a uniquely Nigerian "home grown" democracy were abandoned with the adoption of a federal constitution and a system of government modeled after the American presidential system. The transition program culminated in the election of a former military ruler, Olusegun Obasanjo, as president in 1999. It also led to the establishment of a fragile but inclusive democratic political system that ushered Nigeria into the 21st century.

Like most colonial creations, African nations are unique in the fact that the people who make up the nation often had little or no say in the creation of these nations. Modern nation-states in Africa were more or less accidents of colonial rule. With the end of colonial rule, the central challenge that many of these states face is one of forging cohesive nations out of the fragmented colonial states bequeathed at independence. Nigeria epitomizes this challenge. The greatest challenge to the idea of the Nigerian nation remains the sheer diversity of its constituent ethnic and religious groups as well as the arbitrary colonial circumstances that led to its creation. The task of building a cohesive nation and forging a sense of national identity among its people is one that the country has grappled with since its independence and will likely continue to grapple with in the years ahead.

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