



*Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.*

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Covering 356,668 square miles (923,770 square kilometers), Nigeria is about the same size as California, Nevada, and Utah combined. Its geography is as diverse as its people and culture. About 30 percent of the land is suitable for cultivation; 15 percent is covered by forests or woodlands. Desert areas are found in the far north. The country also features the grassy plains of the Jos Plateau in the north-central region, sandy beaches and mangrove swamps along the coast, and tropical rain forests and parklands in the central region.

Nigeria is divided into three areas by the Niger and Benue Rivers, which meet and flow together to the Gulf of Guinea. These three regions (north, southwest, southeast) correspond roughly to the boundaries of the three largest ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo). Where the three rivers flow into the Atlantic is called the Delta Region, the source of most of Nigeria's oil. The country's climate in the north is dry; the rainy season is from April to October. In the south, the climate is hot and humid year-round.

**History.** Nigeria, with its many ethnic groups, has a rich and diverse history that stretches back to at least 500 B.C., when the Nok people inhabited the area. Various empires flourished in different regions for centuries. The Hausa, who live in the north, converted to Islam in the 13th century and established a feudal system that was solidified over time. The Fulani built a great empire in the 1800s. In the southwest, the Yoruba established the Kingdom of Oyo and extended its influence as far as modern Togo. The Ibo, located in the southeast, remained relatively isolated.

At the end of the 15th century, European explorers and traders made contact with the Yoruba and Benin peoples and began a lucrative slave trade. The British joined the trade in the 1600s

but abolished it in 1807. Most slaves taken from this region were shipped to North and South America as opposed to Europe. Although no European power had as yet colonized the area, British influence increased until 1861, when Britain declared the area around Lagos a crown colony. By 1914, the entire area had become the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.

When Nigeria became independent in 1960 (a republic in 1963), tensions began to rise among the various ethnic groups. After two coups and much unrest, the Ibo-dominated eastern region attempted to secede and establish the Republic of Biafra. Two and a half years of civil war (1967–70) followed, and the Ibo were forced back into the republic after more than one million people died.

National elections in 1979 established a representative civilian government, but it lasted only until late 1983, when a military coup gave General Mohammed Buhari control. He banned political parties. In 1985, Major General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew Buhari. He later promised civilian rule by 1992. Elections between two officially approved parties occurred in 1991. In preparation for democracy, the capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja in 1991.

National elections were held in June 1993. However, once it was apparent that Chief Moshood Abiola (a Yoruba) would win, Babangida refused to accept the results. He annulled the election and rioting broke out in many cities. After a power struggle, Babangida resigned. His rival, General Sani Abacha, seized power from the interim government.

Abacha dissolved democratic institutions and declared himself ruler of Nigeria. Human-rights abuses, corruption, and oppression became Abacha's hallmarks. Strikes and unrest failed to force him from power. International pressure even

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failed to stop the 1995 execution of nine activists who had campaigned against oil industry damage to Ogoni lands. The Commonwealth suspended Nigeria's membership.

Abacha promised a return to democracy by the end of 1998 but allowed only five loyal parties to register in legislative elections. He then ordered all five parties to nominate him as their presidential candidate.

When Abacha died of a heart attack in June 1998, the nation celebrated and then waited to see whether his successor, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, would follow in his footsteps. Abubakar released political prisoners and fired Abacha loyalists. In July 1998, he agreed to release Chief Abiola and he reaffirmed his desire to eventually turn power over to a civilian government. Abiola died of a heart attack on the eve of his release. This prompted new chaos and ethnic-based violence. When calm was restored, opposition leaders renewed calls for the military to step aside in favor of civilian rule.

Unlike past military rulers, Abubakar kept his promise to hold free and fair elections beginning with local polls in December 1998. Legislative and presidential elections followed in February 1999. Olusegun Obasanjo, former military leader in the 1970s, was elected president and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) won a majority of parliamentary seats. A new constitution based on the 1979 constitution became law as Obasanjo took office in May 1999. The new president pledged to fight corruption, and the Commonwealth restored Nigeria's membership and lifted sanctions.

Unfortunately, the atmosphere of greater democracy unleashed simmering grievances between various regions, ethnic groups, and religions. Thousands have been killed in fighting between Christians and Muslims, between Yoruba and Hausa, and between ethnic groups in the Delta Region. Northern, Muslim-dominated states have enacted policies to implement *shari'a* (Islamic law) in order to enforce morality and other Islamic values, angering these states' Christian minority. Activists in the Delta Region often attack oil refineries and workers to demand a greater portion of oil revenue. Obasanjo, reelected in 2003, has been unable to reduce these long-standing tensions.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** Nigeria's population of 133.9 million is growing at an annual rate of 2.5 percent. The country is home to more than 250 ethnic groups, the largest of which include the Hausa (21 percent of the population) and Fulani (9) in the north, the Yoruba (20) in the southwest, and the Ibo (17) in the southeast. Each ethnic group has a distinct cultural heritage. Other smaller groups, such as the Ogoni, comprise the remaining 33 percent of the population.

The primary groups in the Delta Region include the Ijaw, Itsekeri, and Urhobo. Ijaws and Itsekeris have been fighting violently over land rights and oil revenues, while they and others also target (with terrorism and kidnapping) Western oil companies and the government over the same issues. Under the 1999 constitution, a greater share of oil revenues is to remain in the region, and resources are to become more balanced on a national basis. Progress with these policies has prompted violence by groups that stand to lose influence and power with greater equality and democracy.

**Language.** More than 250 languages are spoken in Nigeria. English is the official language, although less than half the population can actually speak it. Many consider English a foreign language. Pidgin English (a combination of basic English

and local languages) aids communication between people of different ethnic groups; it is often used in casual conversation. Each ethnic group has its own distinct language. Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, and Fulani are widely spoken. In various regions, people speak their own ethnic language and then the language of the area's largest ethnic group. Educated Nigerians are often fluent in several languages.

**Religion.** Nigeria is divided primarily between Muslims and Christians. The north is mostly Muslim, and the southeast is primarily Christian. About half the residents of the southwest are Muslim; half are Christian. In all, about 50 percent of Nigerians are Muslim and 40 percent are Christian. Nigerians who follow traditional African belief systems exclusively (10 percent) are spread throughout the country. Many Christians and Muslims also incorporate indigenous African worship practices and beliefs into their daily lives.

Central to Muslims is their belief in the *Qur'an* (Koran) as the word of *Allah* revealed to the prophet Muhammad. They show devotion through the Five Pillars of Islam: professing that there is no God but *Allah* and Muhammad is his prophet; praying five times daily while facing Makkah, Saudi Arabia; giving money to the poor; fasting from dawn to dusk during the holy month of *Ramadan*; and making a pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime, if possible.

As part of the 1999 constitution, the predominantly Muslim northern states have the option of establishing *shari'a* courts to handle certain cases. The states have interpreted that to mean *shari'a* can be the governing force in most local matters, a policy opposed by Christians and others.

**General Attitudes.** Individual Nigerians tend to identify first with their ethnicity, next their religion, and then their nationality. This helps explain the difficulty in uniting them or in solving disputes. Educated Nigerians avoid using the word "tribe," preferring "ethnic group"; however, the average person is not insulted by the word "tribe" when discussing ethnicity. People take great pride in their heritage. In addition to the Delta clashes, tensions exist between various groups due to their traditional spheres of influence, as well as past conflicts. For instance, the Ibo control some oil areas and are still bitter about the Biafra war; in 2000, some revived a call for independence. Yoruba tend to control the press and financial sector; they often led pro-democracy protests in the 1990s. The Hausa have held political and military control since independence. Obasanjo, a Yoruba, has his support base among the Hausa because of his past military ties.

Northerners tend to be quiet, reserved, and conservative in dealing with others. To them, raising the voice indicates anger. Southerners are more likely to be open and outgoing. They enjoy public debate and arguing. They may often shout to make a point or attract attention; shouting does not necessarily indicate anger. Daily life in Nigeria moves at a relaxed pace. Schedules are not as important as the needs of an individual.

**Personal Appearance.** Dress varies according to the area and culture, but dressing well is important for all Nigerians. Northern Muslims dress conservatively. Attire is more casual and more Western among the Ibo. Most people prefer traditional African fashions to Western clothing, although T-shirts and pants are worn in urban areas. Traditional men's dress is loose and comfortable. Shirts typically extend to the knees. Women and young girls usually wear a long wraparound skirt, a short-sleeved top, and a scarf. Nigerian fabrics are known for their bright colors and unique patterns. Nigerian fashions are popular in other African countries.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** In Nigeria, greetings are highly valued among the different ethnic groups. Neglecting to greet another or rushing through a greeting is a sign of disrespect. Therefore, people are courteous and cheerful when exchanging greetings. Because of the diversity of customs, cultures, and dialects in Nigeria, English greetings are widely used throughout the country. Nigerians use *Hello* but perhaps not as often as *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, and *Good evening*.

After the initial greeting, people usually inquire about each other's well-being, work, or family. The appropriate response is usually *Fine*, but one listens to this response before proceeding with the conversation. Personal space between members of the same sex is limited, and Nigerians may stand or sit very close when conversing.

**Gestures.** Nigeria is a multicultural nation, and gestures differ from one ethnic group to another. Pushing the palm of the hand forward with the fingers spread is vulgar and should be avoided. Hausa do not point the sole of the foot or shoe at another person. Most people pass objects with the right hand or both hands but usually not the left hand alone. Yoruba often wink at their children if they want them to leave the room when guests are visiting. People beckon by waving all fingers together with the palm facing down.

**Visiting.** Visiting plays an important part in maintaining family and friendship ties. It is common for Nigerians to visit their relatives frequently. Unannounced guests are welcome, as planning ahead is not possible in many areas where telephones are not widely available. Hosts endeavor to make guests feel comfortable and usually offer them some refreshments. Invited guests are not expected to bring gifts, but small gifts are appreciated. For social engagements or other planned activities, a starting time may be indicated, but guests are not expected to be on time. Late guests are anticipated and they do not disrupt the event.

**Eating.** Eating habits depend on one's ethnic group and social status. Some Nigerians eat their meals with the hand (right hand only), while others use utensils. Hands generally are kept above the table. Families try to eat at least the main meal together, although in some traditional families men eat separately from women and children. Most people wash their hands before eating. Invited guests are expected at least to try any food that is offered. Eating while walking is considered rude. Tipping is common in restaurants and for most personal services.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** The family is a source of strength and comfort for Nigerians. Extended family networks are very important. In general, Nigerian families are male dominated. However, women are active in politics and do earn nearly one-third of the nation's income. Polygamy is not uncommon. By Islamic law, a Muslim male can have as many as four wives with the consent of the other(s), provided he can care for each wife equally. Many other Nigerians also practice polygamy. While the sheltered status of Muslim women in Nigeria is similar to that of other Islamic countries, most other Nigerian women enjoy a great degree of freedom, both in influencing family decisions and in openly trading at the marketplace. About one-fifth of the labor force is female. Large families traditionally share the workload at home. Nigerians have deep respect for their elders. Children are trained to be quiet, respectful, and unassertive in their relations with adults.

**Dating and Marriage.** Western-style dating is uncommon in rural areas, but it is practiced by some urban youth. In Muslim areas, a person may be punished (flogged) for immorality. Marriage customs vary, but the payment of a bridal token or dowry is common throughout the country. The groom is expected to give money, property, or service to the family of the bride. Women usually marry by the time they are twenty and men marry in their midtwenties. Living together without a formal marriage ceremony is common and socially acceptable in the south. Many couples find a wedding to be too expensive. Some northern governments provide subsidies to help such couples have a proper wedding and avoid violating *shari'a*.

**Diet.** The mainstays of the Nigerian diet are yams, cassava (a starchy root), and rice. Yoruba are fond of hot, spicy food. Their meals normally are accompanied by a pepper sauce made with fish, meat, or chicken. Climatic conditions provide for a wide selection of fruits and vegetables to supplement the diet. Because of the tsetse fly, dairy cattle are scarce in coastal regions, but canned margarine, cheese, and powdered milk are used as dairy-product substitutes. The Fulani who herd cattle have dairy products, and they eat yogurt (and sell it mixed with millet and sugar).

**Recreation.** Nigerians primarily enjoy soccer, although the wealthy also like wrestling, polo, cricket, and swimming. Nigerians are extremely proud of their national soccer team, which has been successful in international competitions and won the gold medal in the 1996 Summer Olympics. Nigerians do not have access to working movie theaters, but they watch videos and television. U.S. productions are most popular. Live theater and art exhibits are well attended by the educated elite. Rural women have little time for recreation, but they socialize while doing chores or fixing hair. Men are more likely to spend time talking or drinking with one another. In many areas, visiting is the primary leisure activity. Nigerians also enjoy traditional music and dance.

**The Arts.** Nigerian music often combines Western and traditional elements. Derived from Ghanaian *highlife*, Nigerian *juju* incorporates guitars with the *dundun*, known as the "talking drum" because its tones can be understood as words. *Fuji* music has no guitars but uses several drums. Dancing commonly accompanies both *juju* and *fuji*.

Nigeria's painters and sculptors use modern techniques while drawing from indigenous themes. Among Nigeria's many folk arts are soapstone and wooden statuettes. Wooden masks are used in traditional religious ceremonies. Nigerian writers have received international recognition; among the most prominent are Chinua Achebe and Nobel Prize recipient Wole Soyinka.

**Holidays.** National holidays include New Year's Day, Labor Day (1 May), and National Day (1 Oct.). In addition, Christian and Muslim holy days are celebrated by the entire country. Muslim holidays are determined according to the lunar calendar, which is shorter than the Western (Gregorian) year by about 11 days. Since dates are set according to the moon's phases, the Gregorian dates for holidays differ from year to year. These holidays include *Maulid an-Nabi* (the prophet Muhammad's birthday), *Idul Fitr* (a three-day feast at the end of the month of *Ramadan*), and *Idul Adha* (the Feast of the Sacrifice). During *Ramadan*, families eat together in the evenings and visit friends. Christian holidays include Easter (Friday–Monday), Christmas, and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). Boxing Day is a day for visiting. It comes from a British tradition of giving

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small boxed gifts to service workers the day after Christmas.

**Commerce.** Most businesses are open from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 2 to 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Shops in the north close at 1 p.m. on Friday, the Muslim day of worship. Government offices usually close by 3 p.m. each day. Business is rarely discussed on the phone, and appointments are scheduled in advance.

## SOCIETY

**Government.** The Federal Republic of Nigeria is composed of 36 states, each with elected governors and legislatures. The president (currently Olusegun Obasanjo) is head of state and head of government. According to the constitution, the president can serve a maximum of two four-year terms. Parliament consists of a 109-seat Senate (three seats for each state and one for the capital) and a 360-seat House of Representatives. Members of both chambers are elected to four-year terms. The voting age is 21.

**Economy.** Nigeria's economy is one of the largest in Africa and has great potential for high productivity, diversity, and vitality. Unfortunately, it has been battered by political turmoil, fluctuations in world oil prices, corruption, and poor central planning. Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil producers, but only a minority of the population actually benefits from oil revenue. Many Nigerians have no income or do not earn enough to meet their needs. Unemployment and inflation are high. Agriculture employs about 40 percent of the population. Nigeria is a major producer of peanuts. Other key crops include cotton, cocoa, yams, cassava, sorghum, corn, and rice. Rubber and cocoa are important exports. Petroleum accounts for 95 percent of all export earnings. In addition to oil-related and agriculture-processing industries, Nigeria has textile, cement, steel, chemical, and other industries. The currency is the *naira* (NGN).

**Transportation and Communications.** Nigerian cities are linked by roads, railroads, and air routes, but traffic is heavy on the roads, about half of which are not paved. Many people travel by bus in and between cities because few own cars. Fuel is expensive and in short supply. Taxis are plentiful in the cities. Nigeria's modern but poorly maintained telephone system is being expanded. Most newspapers are printed in English. There are several radio and television stations. Rural Nigerians rely on word-of-mouth and radio for information.

**Education.** Nigerians value education as the key to future success. Each of Nigeria's states provides primary and secondary education, and some offer higher education. While about 85 percent of all pupils complete the primary level, only 20 percent enroll in secondary school. This may be due to the fact that school instruction is in English. Children are required to grapple with a new language before they can even learn the skills they should acquire. By the time they are 12, most students perform poorly in both English and standard skills. A government program to promote the use of an area's dominant native tongue in primary schools was recently introduced in a few districts. The program is designed to give students basic skills first and introduce English later, but critics claim it will only add to ethnic tensions because not all of Nigeria's languages will be used in schools. In states with *shari'a*, boys and

## DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	152 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	124 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$850
Adult literacy rate	73 percent (male); 58 (female)
Infant mortality rate	71 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	51 (male); 52 (female)

girls attend separate schools.

Although education for rural children is limited, government programs have doubled enrollment in some areas. Educational emphasis is on applied science and technology, with a goal to introduce more Nigerians into the skilled workforce. A considerable number of Nigerians attend universities around the world. Men are more likely to be literate than women.

**Health.** Less than 70 percent of the population has access to health care, and public hospitals are understaffed and poorly supplied. The best care is available at medical colleges. Private clinics are too expensive for most people. Facilities and care are inadequate in rural areas, and infant mortality remains relatively high. Twenty percent of all children die before they reach age five. Only two-thirds of all one-year-olds are immunized. Maternal mortality rates are among the world's highest. Tropical diseases present serious challenges for the people. AIDS takes more lives each year.

## AT A GLANCE

### Events and Trends.

- In January 2004, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan met with Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo and Cameroon's President Paul Biya in an effort to resolve a border dispute between the two nations. Nigeria has refused to accept a section of a 2002 ruling by the International Court of Justice that granted the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon. However, in December 2003 Nigeria cooperated with separate section of the ruling by ceding to Cameroon a total of 32 villages near Lake Chad on Nigeria's northeastern border.
- Nigeria hosted leaders from the nations of the Commonwealth for the organization's annual summit, held in Abuja in December 2003.
- More than one hundred people were killed and more than one thousand injured during clashes between Ijaws and Itsekiris in the town of Warri, located in the Delta Region, in August 2003.
- President Obasanjo won a second term with more than 60 percent of the vote in April 2003 elections. His political party, the PDP, dominated parliamentary elections earlier that month, winning 73 seats in the 109-seat Senate and 213 seats in the 360-seat House of Representatives.

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