

Book Guide

Nigeria and the Nation-State

In *Nigeria and the Nation-State*, John Campbell explains what makes Nigeria different from other countries in Africa, how it works, and why understanding it is vital if we are to avoid the mistakes the United States made in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, as U.S. security and economic relations with Africa intensifies.

Summary

In *Nigeria and the Nation-State*, former diplomat and Africa expert John Campbell provides a clear-eyed vision of Nigeria and why it matters. Nigeria is a case study of many of the challenges faced by other post-colonial, multi-ethnic countries. With population projections to displace the United States as the third largest in the world by 2050 and as one of Africa's largest economies, it has democratic aspirations, yet it is undermined by weak governance, terrorism, and insurgency.

Nigeria is not a conventional nation-state, even if that is how other foreign ministries and international organizations perceive it. It is not quite a nation because Nigerians are not united by language, religion, culture, or a common national story. It is not quite a state because the government is weak and getting weaker, and it fails to provide for the security of its citizens, the primary requirement of any state. Instead, Ambassador Campbell characterizes Nigeria as a prebendal archipelago: prebendal because Nigeria's corrupt elites appropriate public money for private purposes, but prevent the state from breaking apart due to ethnic and religious rivalries out of self-interest. Elites benefit from state preservation through access to revenue from state-owned oil, government contracts, and office, all of which require a formal state. Simultaneously, the elites keep the government weak so they are not challenged, and government authority is restricted geographically to islands in a sea of ungoverned spaces—an archipelago. With this duality, it is a challenge for African democracies to build a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship. Ambassador Campbell concludes with recommendations for different U.S. diplomatic approaches.

This book is suitable for the following types of undergraduate and graduate courses:

- Politics of Africa
- Comparative Politics
- European Colonialism in Africa
- Politics of Oil
- Corruption and Governance
- African History
- U.S. Foreign Policy

Main Takeaways

- There is no such thing as pre-colonial “Nigeria” as it is fundamentally a creation of British colonialism and therefore foreign to the people within it. The government is the successor of the colonial government; there was no revolution at independence, and British officials were replaced by Nigerian ones.
- Nigeria's move toward independence was largely spearheaded by the British rather than a nation-wide independence movement that crossed ethnic divisions.
- Nigerian independence did not undo changes wrought by colonialism, but instead solidified them. Newly independent Nigeria had a government built by British colonial officials; borders drawn by Europeans nearly a century earlier; and it was now part of the post-World War II international state system constructed by the victors.

- The Nigerian state is run by a small cartel of self-serving elites. Its purpose is to provide a venue for their cooperation across religious and ethnic divisions, just enough to divvy up state oil revenue among themselves and their clients. They otherwise do little to improve the lot of the vast majority of Nigerians.
- The government is centralized but weak, while true political power is decentralized in government and non-governmental

Essay and Discussion Questions

Courses on Politics of Africa

1. How does ethnicity influence citizens' view of Nigeria's government?
2. What nonstate institutions exert significant political power in Nigeria? How is political power enacted?
3. Assess how domestic voters in Nigeria view the importance of their country's foreign policy.
4. Are Nigeria's elections free, fair, and competitive? Why or why not?
5. How and among whom is political power distributed within Nigeria?

Courses on Comparative Politics

1. How do Nigeria's politics differ from those of a European nation-state?
2. How has Nigeria's approach to nation-building differed from that of other postcolonial African states, European states, and the United States?
3. Assess the importance of nonstate institutions in the functioning of politics in Nigeria and another country of your choosing.
4. How does the Nigerian government's role in the economy differ from that of most European countries? How does this influence politics?
5. Compare Nigerian security challenges to those faced by a Western state.
6. Nigeria is constitutionally secular, but religion plays a significant role in politics. How does this compare to the United States, another secular country where religion influences politics?

Courses on European Colonialism in Africa

1. How have colonial borders, since adopted as national borders, affected domestic Nigerian politics and relations with neighboring countries?
2. Explain the political, economic, and cultural factors that drove European colonial expansion into one present-day African state.
3. Explain the difference between decolonization and independence, and assess the degree to which Nigeria has achieved either from the United Kingdom.
4. How did British colonization of Nigeria change indigenous governance?
5. What is the significance of Nigeria's lack of an independence movement across ethnic divisions?

Courses on Politics of Oil

1. How does oil revenue alter a state's need to respond to citizen demands?
2. Imagine that you are the president of a middle-income country that just discovered oil. What steps would you take to help your country avoid the "resource curse"?
3. What do you think is more important: protecting the environment or taking advantage of oil reserves? How do you think citizens of poor countries would answer that question?
4. How does the presence of significant oil reserves change a country's foreign policy?
5. Oil brings wealth and investment to countries. How are citizens, especially poor ones, affected?

Courses on Corruption and Governance

1. How does corruption alter citizens' expectations of government?
2. Using Nigeria as an example, how has globalization affected governments' ability to stay corrupt?
3. What role does corruption play in politics and governance?
4. How does corruption fuel violence?
5. How should foreign governments conduct diplomatic relations with a state that is corrupt?

Courses on Introduction to African History

1. How has colonialism affected national identity in Africa?
2. Many African countries have experienced military-led coups. How have coups, and the military more generally, affected democratization in Africa?
3. How did the slave trade (both trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan) affect the trajectory of Nigeria's history to date?
4. Compare the effects of direct rule and indirect rule on Nigerian institutions today.
5. Christianity and Islam are imports to Africa. What role does each religion play in public life in Nigeria?

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy

1. What are U.S. interests in Nigeria?
2. Is close diplomatic collaboration between Abuja and Washington possible? If so, under what circumstances?
3. How should U.S. diplomatic relations with Nigeria be organized?
4. How should Washington determine whether it has a role in Abuja's struggle against terrorist extremism?
5. Do you see parallels between U.S. relations with Nigeria and with Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq?

Supplementary Materials

Books

Wole Adebawo and Ebenezer Obadare, eds., *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

John Campbell and Matthew T. Page, *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Sarah Chayes, *Thieves of State: Why Corruption threatens Global Security* (New York: Norton, 2015).

Herman J. Cohen, *US Policy Toward Africa: Eight Decades of Realpolitik* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2020).

Stephen Ellis, *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organized Crime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader* (London: Hurst and Co., 2018).

Jacob Olupona, *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Nigerian Newspapers (available online)

Daily Trust (Nigeria)

Guardian (Nigeria)

Premium Times (New York and Nigeria)

This Day (Nigeria)

Reports

"Criminal Politics, Violence, 'Godfathers' and Corruption in Nigeria," Human Rights Watch Report 10, no. 16 (A) (2007),

<http://hrw.org/report/2007/10/11/criminal-politics/violence-godfathers-and-corruption-nigeria>.

“Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province,” International Crisis Group, Africa Report 273, May 10, 2019, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/Africa/west-africa/Nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province>.

Matthew Page, “A New Taxonomy of Corruption in Nigeria,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 17, 2018, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/07/17/new-taxonomy-for-corruption-in-nigeria-pub-76811>.

Aaron Sayne, Alexandra Gilles, and Christina Katsouris, “Inside NNPC Oil Sales: A Case for Reform in Nigeria,” Natural Resource Governance Institute, August 4, 2015, <http://resourcegovernance.org/analysis-tools/publications/inside-nnpc-oil-sales-case-reform-nigeria>.

[Visit Book Page](#)