

Book Guide

Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink

In this book, CFR Senior Fellow John Campbell examines Nigeria's postcolonial past and offers policy options for the United States to help promote political, social, and economic development. Teaching notes by the author.

Summary

Nigeria, an important strategic partner of the United States, is in trouble. Government legitimacy has eroded since the 2011 elections, and violence has escalated in the Delta, the Middle Belt, and especially the North with the rise of the militant Islamist organization "Boko Haram." Though Nigerians often claim they are masters of "dancing on the brink without falling off," such challenges threaten to push the nation into the abyss of state failure.

In *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*, Ambassador John Campbell explores Nigeria's postcolonial history and offers a nuanced explanation of the events and conditions that have carried this complex, dynamic, and very troubled giant to the edge. Central to his analysis are the oil wealth, endemic corruption, and elite competition that have undermined Nigeria's nascent democratic institutions and alienated an increasingly impoverished population. Despite these conditions, the book argues that state failure is not inevitable.

In this updated edition, the book includes two entirely new chapters on the breakdown of the political system and the rise of Boko Haram. Ambassador Campbell concludes that the United States should help on the margins, by distancing itself from the government in Abuja and strengthening links with civil society working for good governance, democracy, and the rule of the law. By doing so, the United States would play a positive role in Nigeria's political, social, and economic development and take it off the course toward state failure.

This book is ideal for high school and college courses on U.S. foreign policy in Africa and U.S.-Africa relations, governance in Africa, religion in Africa, conflict in Africa, and democracy and elections in Africa.

Discussion Questions

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa and U.S.-Africa Relations

1. How would you characterize the relationship between the United States and Nigeria? How has it changed over time?
2. What challenges does the United States face in maintaining positive relations with Nigeria?
3. What considerations does the United States need to take into account when formulating policy towards Nigeria?
4. What are the levers of power available to Nigeria as a regional power, and what are the constraints?

Courses on Governance in Africa

1. How is governance in Nigeria and the United States similar? How is it different?
2. How would you define patronage and what role does it play in stabilizing Nigeria's political system, for better and for worse?
3. How have natural resources affected governance in Nigeria?
4. How have religion and ethnicity affected governance in Nigeria?
5. How is governance in Nigeria affected by the government's counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies?

Courses on Religion in Africa

1. How would you characterize the relations between religious groups in Nigeria?
2. How did Nigeria's colonial heritage impact development of the two major religions in Nigeria?
3. How have new freedoms under "democracy" in Nigeria contributed to the spread of "radical" Christianity or Islam?
4. What factors have led to increasing fundamentalism in Nigeria, and how did they contribute to the formation of Boko Haram?
5. Would you characterize Boko Haram as a religious or political group, and why?

Courses on Conflict in Africa

1. How is conflict in Nigeria related to ethnicity, religion, patronage, and natural resources?
2. What are the causes and consequences of the conflict in the Niger Delta?
3. What are the causes and consequences of religious conflict in the Middle Belt?
4. What was the purpose of "zoning," and how will its elimination affect future elections?
5. Is Boko Haram a local, regional, or international organization? How does its structure affect strategies to counter it?

Courses on Democracy and Elections in Africa

1. In what ways does Nigeria aspire to democracy?
2. How does Olusegun Obasanjo exemplify strong presidentialism in Africa?
3. Can changes in leadership improve democracy in Nigeria? What role does civil society have in bringing change?
4. Were the 2011 presidential elections a turning point in Nigeria? If so, how? If not, why?

Essay Questions

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa and U.S.-Africa Relations

1. Why is Nigeria a strategic partner for the United States? Describe at least three U.S. priorities for this partnership, and analyze why current events in Nigeria may strain the relationship.
2. Should U.S. engagement with Nigeria concentrate on Nigerian politics or civil society?

Courses on Governance in Africa

1. Compare and contrast the approaches to governance by Northern and Southern governors, specifically those in Lagos and Sokoto.
2. Has governance in Nigeria improved since the return to civilian rule in 1999, or worsened?

Courses on Religion in Africa

1. Compare and contrast the role of religion in politics in Nigeria and the United States. In your analysis, consider which approach is more conducive to inclusive governance and why.
2. Discuss the relationship between Sufi Islam and radicalism in Nigeria. Do traditions of Sufi Islam act as a buffer against radicalism in Nigeria? Is this changing?
3. Are the conflicts in the Middle Belt primarily religious, ethnic, or political in nature?

Courses on Conflict in Africa

1. Should the Nigerian state approach Boko Haram as a terrorist or insurgent group? What would be the differences in the state's approach based on these categorizations?
2. Discuss two separate conflict resolution strategies to the conflicts in the Middle Belt and compare their advantages and disadvantages.

Courses on Democracy and Elections in Africa

1. Identify three potential tensions in the lead up to elections in Nigeria, and provide strategies for countering them.

2. How has Nigeria's oil affected democracy in Nigeria?

Supplementary Materials

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"Nigeria: Trapped in the Cycle of Violence," Amnesty International, November 2012.

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Zenn, Jacob, "Northern Nigeria's Boko Haram: The Prize in al-Qaeda's Africa Strategy," Jamestown Foundation, December 6, 2012.

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Packer, George, "The Megacity: Decoding the chaos of Lagos," *The New Yorker*, November 13, 2006.

"The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Delta Unrest," Africa Report No. 115 – 3, International Crisis Group, August 3, 2006.

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