Nigeria Since Independence: A History Guide

SECTION D: NIGERIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE
This section chronicles Nigeria's post-independence history, marked by periods of democratic rule and military intervention, significant internal conflicts, and its evolving role on the global stage.

1. The Politics of the First Republic and Military Interventions (1960-1966)

Nigeria's First Republic was characterized by intense regional and political rivalries, ultimately leading to its collapse.

- **Struggle for the Control of the Centre:**
  - Following independence in 1960, the regional political parties (NPC, NCNC, AG) struggled for dominance at the federal level.
  - The NPC, based in the populous Northern Region, formed a coalition government with the NCNC at the centre, effectively marginalizing the Action Group (AG). This created an imbalance of power, as the North controlled the federal government due to its demographic strength.
  - Competition for federal resources and appointments intensified regional and ethnic divisions.
- **Post-Election Controversies:**
  - The 1964 federal election was marred by widespread rigging, boycotts, and violence. The results were highly disputed, leading to a political crisis that further destabilized the First Republic.
  - The Western Region election of 1965 was even more contentious, with allegations of massive rigging, widespread violence, and a breakdown of law and order, turning the region into a "wild, wild west."
- **Minority Question:**
  - During the colonial era and leading up to independence, minority ethnic groups (e.g., Tiv, Ijaw, Ogoni, Calabar, Edo, Middle Belt groups) within the three large regions (North, West, East) feared domination by the majority groups.
  - They agitated for the creation of their own states to protect their interests and identities. The colonial powers set up the Willink Commission in 1957 to address these fears, but no new states were created before independence.
  - This unresolved minority issue remained a source of tension and instability in the First Republic.

- **Major Political Controversies:**
    - **Tiv Riots (1960, 1964):** Violent uprisings in the Tivland (Northern Region) due to dissatisfaction with the native authority system and political marginalization by the ruling NPC.
    - **Census Controversies (1962, 1963):** Disputes over the national population census figures, particularly between the North and South. The census results were crucial for revenue allocation and parliamentary representation, making them highly politicized. The 1963 census, though also controversial, was eventually accepted.
    - **Labour Strikes:** Widespread industrial action and strikes over poor working conditions and wages, reflecting general economic discontent.
    - **Corruption Allegations:** Perceived widespread corruption among politicians fueled public disillusionment.
- **The Action Group Crisis and the General Elections of 1964:**
    - **Action Group Crisis (1962):** A severe internal power struggle within the Action Group (AG) between its leader, Obafemi Awolowo, and his deputy, Samuel Akintola (the Premier of the Western Region).
    - The crisis stemmed from ideological differences and a struggle for control of the party and the Western Region. Akintola preferred cooperation with the NPC-led federal government, while Awolowo advocated for a more radical opposition stance.
    - This led to a split in the AG, violence in the Western House of Assembly, and eventually, the federal government declared a state of emergency in the Western Region, appointing an administrator.
    - Awolowo and some of his associates were later arrested and imprisoned on charges of treasonable felony.
    - **General Elections of 1964:** As mentioned earlier, this election was highly fraught with irregularities, boycotts by the opposition UPGA (United Progressive Grand Alliance, formed by NCNC and AG factions), and violence. The NPC and its allies largely won, but the legitimacy of the outcome was heavily questioned.
- **The Coup d'état of January 1966 and the Civil War:**
    - **January 15, 1966 Coup:** Led by a group of young, mostly Igbo, army majors (e.g., Major Kaduna Nzeogwu), who aimed to rid Nigeria of corrupt politicians and ethnic rivalries.
    - **Impact of the Coup:** The coup was poorly executed and ultimately failed in its objective. It led to the assassination of key political figures, including the Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Premier of the Northern Region Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Western Region Samuel Akintola, and senior military officers.
    - **Consequences:** The coup was perceived as an Igbo-led coup against Northern and Western leaders, which inflamed ethnic tensions, particularly in the North. This eventually led to:
        - **The July 1966 Counter-Coup:** Led by Northern officers, which brought Yakubu Gowon to power and resulted in the massacre of Igbo civilians in Northern Nigeria.
        - **The Nigerian Civil War:** The subsequent declaration of the Republic of Biafra by Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in May 1967, and the federal government's refusal to accept secession, ignited a brutal civil war (1967-1970).

2. The Civil War: Cause and Effects (1967-1970)

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, was a devastating conflict that shaped post-independence Nigeria.

- **Cause:**
  - **Immediate Cause:** The declaration of the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967, by Lt. Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, following a series of events that included the 1966 coups and the widespread killing of Igbo people in the North.
  - **Underlying Causes:**
    - **Ethnic Suspicion and Rivalry:** Deep-seated distrust among Nigeria's major ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba) and minority groups.
    - **Political Instability:** The failure of the First Republic and the violent military coups of 1966.
    - **Mass Killings of Igbo People:** The pogroms against Igbo people in Northern Nigeria in 1966, which led to a mass exodus of Igbos back to their Eastern Region homeland.
    - **Abrogation of Federalism:** General Ironsi's unitary decree, which attempted to abolish the federal structure, was viewed with suspicion, particularly in the North.
    - **Personality Clashes:** Between federal Head of State Yakubu Gowon and Eastern Region Governor Emeka Ojukwu.
    - **Control of Oil Wealth:** The discovery and increasing importance of crude oil in the Niger Delta, much of which was located in the Eastern Region, added an economic dimension to the conflict.
- **Effect:**
  - **Massive Loss of Life:** Estimates vary, but over one million lives were lost, primarily from starvation and disease due to the federal blockade of Biafra.
  - **Devastation of the Eastern Region:** Widespread destruction of infrastructure, homes, and farmlands in the former Eastern Region.
  - **Economic Setback:** Significant disruption to the national economy, though oil production was rapidly ramped up after the war.
  - **Centralization of Power:** The war led to a highly centralized federal government and increased military control over state affairs.
  - **Creation of States:** Gowon's creation of 12 states in 1967 (from the original 4 regions) was partly a strategic move to weaken Biafran solidarity by carving out minority areas from the Eastern Region, and to prevent future regional domination.
  - **Reconciliation Efforts:** The federal government pursued a policy of "no victor, no vanquished," focusing on reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction after the war.
  - **National Unity (Preservation):** The war ultimately preserved Nigeria's territorial integrity as a single nation-state.
  - **Military Entrenchment:** Solidified the military's role in Nigerian politics for decades to come.

3. Military Regimes in Nigeria

Military rule became a recurring feature of Nigeria's political landscape after 1966.

- **The Gowon Regime (1966-1975):**
    - Came to power after the July 1966 counter-coup.
    - Successfully prosecuted the Civil War, preserving Nigeria's unity.
    - Created 12 states in 1967.
    - Implemented the "Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction" program after the war.
    - Benefited from the oil boom, leading to increased federal revenue.
    - His regime was overthrown in a bloodless coup in 1975 due to accusations of corruption, indecision, and a perceived abandonment of the promise to return to civilian rule.
- **The Murtala/Obasanjo Regime (1975-1979):**
    - **Murtala Mohammed (1975-1976):** Known for his decisive, no-nonsense style. Launched an aggressive anti-corruption campaign, purged the civil service, and initiated a clear timetable for return to civilian rule. Created 7 new states (bringing the total to 19). Assassinated in an abortive coup in February 1976.
    - **Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979):** Succeeded Murtala. Steadfastly implemented the transition program. Oversaw the drafting of the 1979 Constitution, organized elections, and successfully handed over power to a civilian government (Shehu Shagari) in October 1979.
- **The Second Republic (1979-1983):**
    - Led by President Shehu Shagari (National Party of Nigeria - NPN).
    - Marked by a return to presidential democracy.
    - Suffered from political corruption, economic mismanagement (despite oil wealth), and increasing violence.
    - The 1983 general elections were widely condemned for massive rigging and irregularities.
    - Overthrown by a military coup in December 1983.
- **The Buhari Regime (1983-1985):**
    - Head of State: Major General Muhammadu Buhari.
    - Came to power promising to tackle corruption and indiscipline.
    - Launched the "War Against Indiscipline" (WAI) campaign.
    - Imposed strict austerity measures.
    - Detained many politicians from the Second Republic.
    - Criticized for human rights abuses (e.g., Decree No. 2, retroactive decrees).
    - Overthrown in a palace coup by his Chief of Army Staff.
- **The Babangida Regime (1985-1993):**
    - Head of State: General Ibrahim Babangida ("Maradona").
    - Dubbed his regime a "military-civilian diarchy" and promised a gradual transition to democracy.
    - Introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986.
    - Shifted the capital to Abuja.
    - Promised and repeatedly shifted the transition to civilian rule, earning him the nickname "Evil Genius."

    - Annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election, widely regarded as Nigeria's freest and fairest election (won by M.K.O. Abiola). This plunged Nigeria into a deep political crisis.
    - "Stepped aside" in August 1993, installing an Interim National Government (ING).
- **The Interim National Government (ING) (1993):**
    - Headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan.
    - A short-lived transitional government established by Babangida after annulling the June 12 election.
    - It lacked legitimacy and public support.
    - Overthrown by General Sani Abacha after only 82 days.
- **The Abacha Regime (1993-1998):**
    - Head of State: General Sani Abacha.
    - Regarded as one of Nigeria's most repressive regimes.
    - Cracked down on opposition, civil society, and the media.
    - Detained M.K.O. Abiola.
    - Orchestrated the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others.
    - Nigeria was isolated internationally, facing sanctions.
    - Attempted a self-succession bid.
    - His sudden death in June 1998 paved the way for a new transition program under General Abdulsalami Abubakar.

4. Nigeria in International Organizations

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation, has actively participated in various international organizations, advocating for African interests and global peace.

- **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):**
    - **Origin:** Established in 1975, largely through the efforts of Nigeria and Togo.
    - **Objectives:** To promote economic integration and cooperation among West African states, leading to the establishment of a common market and customs union. Later expanded to include political and security cooperation.
    - **Role of Nigeria:** Nigeria has been a driving force behind ECOWAS, contributing the largest share of its budget and troops for peacekeeping missions (e.g., ECOMOG in Liberia, Sierra Leone). It sees ECOWAS as a vital tool for regional stability and economic development.
- **African Union (AU):**
    - **Origin:** Successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), established in 2002.
    - **Objectives:** To promote unity, solidarity, and cooperation among African states; to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states; to accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent; to promote peace, security, and stability.
    - **Role of Nigeria:** A major player in the AU, contributing significantly to its budget and peacekeeping operations. Nigeria often champions African causes on the international stage and advocates for African solutions to African problems.
- **Commonwealth:**
    - **Origin:** A voluntary association of independent sovereign states, mostly former territories of the British Empire. Nigeria joined upon independence in 1960.
    - **Objectives:** To promote democracy, human rights, rule of law, and economic development among member states.

    - **Role of Nigeria:** An active member, participating in its various programs and conferences. Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth during the Abacha regime due to human rights abuses but was re-admitted after the return to civilian rule.
- **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC):**
    - **Origin:** Formed in 1960 by major oil-producing countries to coordinate and unify petroleum policies among member countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers. Nigeria joined in 1971.
    - **Objectives:** To stabilize oil markets, ensure a steady supply of oil to consumers, and secure a fair return on investment for producers.
    - **Role of Nigeria:** As a major oil producer, Nigeria is a key member of OPEC, influencing global oil prices and policies. Its economy is heavily reliant on oil revenue, making its participation in OPEC crucial.
- **United Nations Organization (UNO):**
    - **Origin:** Established in 1945 to promote international cooperation and maintain international peace and security. Nigeria joined shortly after independence in 1960.
    - **Objectives:** To prevent wars, promote human rights, foster social and economic development, protect the environment, and provide humanitarian aid.
    - **Role of Nigeria:** An active and influential member, often serving on the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member. Nigeria contributes troops to UN peacekeeping missions worldwide, advocates for developing countries, and participates in various UN agencies and programs.
- **The Role of Nigeria in Conflict Resolution:**
    - Nigeria has a strong track record of active involvement in conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts, particularly in West Africa.
    - **ECOMOG:** Led the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone to restore peace and democratic order during their civil wars.
    - **Darfur, Mali, Gambia, etc.:** Contributes troops and resources to AU and UN peacekeeping missions across Africa and beyond.
    - **Diplomacy:** Engages in mediation and diplomatic initiatives to resolve regional disputes.
    - **Financial and Logistical Support:** Provides significant financial and logistical support to regional and continental peace efforts.
    - Nigeria's foreign policy prioritizes Africa as its "centre-piece," leading it to take on leadership roles in promoting peace and security on the continent.