



Nigeria

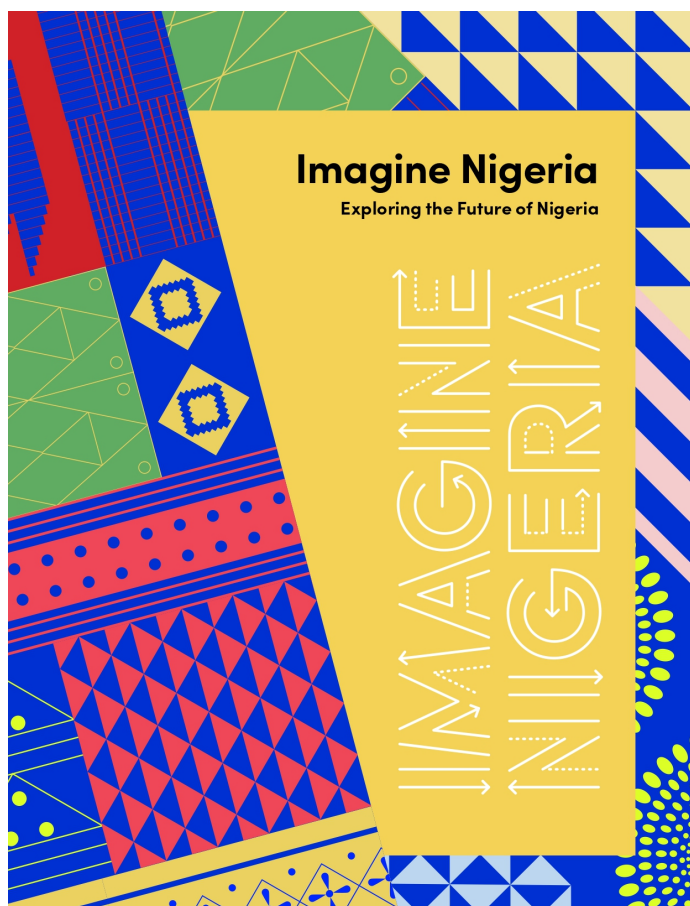
Background

Kouassi Yeboua, Jakkie Cilliers and Alize le Roux

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Background

Chart 3: Imagine Nigeria report



For much of the four decades following independence in 1960, Nigeria was ruled by the military. The country only began its democratic transition in 1999.

Except for two short periods of civilian rule (1960–1966 and 1979–1983), the period 1960–1999 was marked by a succession of several military regimes that ruled the country after coming to power through coups d'état. The first two coups d'état in January and July of 1966 led to the Biafra War (1967–1970), which claimed more than one million lives, mostly from starvation.[1]

In 1979, the army, led by General Olusegun Obasanjo, transferred power to an elected government. However, the second attempt at a democratic political system failed and the military returned to power. The worsened economic failures of the civil government under President Shehu Shagari ushered in a military coup led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari in December 1983. Nearly two years later, General Buhari's regime was, in turn, overthrown by a coup led by General Ibrahim Babangida.

The latter engaged in tightly controlled economic reforms under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to facilitate the repayment of crushing external debt. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which was in effect between 1986 and 1993, was highly controversial and incited intense public unrest. For instance, between 1986 and 1993, the number of strikes in the country tripled even as the military government intensified its survivalist strategies by banning labour unions and arresting unionists.[2]

After the controversial annulment of the nationwide election results in mid-1993, Babangida, under the pressure of continued civil unrest, ceded power to an interim government (caretaker government). But this interim government was short-lived and was toppled by General Sani Abacha in November 1993. Nigeria experienced its worst military dictatorship under the Abacha regime, and this experience contributed to the military completely losing legitimacy in ruling the country.[3] General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who took over after the death of Sani Abacha in 1998, freed all political prisoners and paved the way for early elections, which were won by the former head of the junta, Olusegun Obasanjo, in 1999.

The economic and social effects of these successive military regimes were disastrous. For example, in the 1980s, about 45% of foreign exchange earnings went into debt servicing, and there was very little growth and a rise in poverty and crime.[4] Political leadership also became self-serving and driven by ethnicity and patron-client politics.[5]

President Olusegun Obasanjo was re-elected in 2003, though the election was marred by electoral fraud and violence. Four years later, he was succeeded by Umaru Yar'Adua, who won the April 2007 presidential elections. However, health concerns prevented him from fully exercising his powers and, shortly before his death in May 2010, the National Assembly passed a resolution that allowed the then vice president, Goodluck Jonathan, to serve as president. Immediately after Yar'Adua's death, Jonathan was sworn in as executive president and later won the 2011 presidential elections.

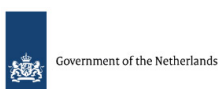
In 2015, the All Progressives Congress (APC) party led by Muhammadu Buhari won the elections by promising to crack down on terrorism and corruption, modernise the economy and reduce poverty. Buhari secured a second term at the 2019 presidential elections, despite the fact that the results were contested by the main opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

In sum, Nigeria's economic and political transformation process since independence has been marked by progress and setbacks. However, there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of the country. The transition from authoritarian military regimes to democratic civilian rule offers an opportunity for the population to elect a developmentally oriented governing elite.

Endnotes

1. BITI, Nigeria Country Report, 2020, www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report-NGA-2020.html.
2. A Danladi and P Naankiel, Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria and Its Implication on Socio-Economic Development, 1980–1995, *The Calabar Historical Journal*, 6:2, 2016.
3. A Danladi and P Naankiel, Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria and Its Implication on Socio-Economic Development, 1980–1995, *The Calabar Historical Journal*, 6:2, 2016.
4. M Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966–1976)*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2009.
5. D Yagboyaju and O Akinola, Nigerian State and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Exposition, *SAGE Open*, 2019, doi: 10.1177/2158244019865810

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Dr Kouassi Yeboua is a senior researcher in African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. He recently served as lead author on ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the DR Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Malawi. Kouassi has published on various issues relating to foreign direct investment in Africa and is interested in development economics, macroeconomics, international economics, and economic modelling. He has a PhD in Economics.

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Ms Alize le Roux joined the AFI in May 2021 as a senior researcher. Before joining the ISS, she worked as a principal geo-informatics researcher at the CSIR, supporting various local and national policy- and decision-makers with long-term planning support. Alize has 14 years of experience in spatial data analysis, disaster risk reduction and urban and regional modelling. She has a master's degree in geographical sciences from the University of Utrecht, specialising in multi-hazard risk assessments and spatial decision support systems.

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