

NIGERIA

CAPITAL: LAGOS—POPULATION: 55 MILLION

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, which became independent on October 1, 1960, is the most populous country in Africa. Located on the West Coast of the continent astride the 10th north parallel, Nigeria is bounded on the south by the Gulf of Guinea and on the landward sides by the Federal Republic of Cameroon and the Republics of Chad, Niger, and Dahomey.

Four main regions may be distinguished in Nigeria in terms of vegetation, altitude, and climate: (1) the hot, humid coastal belt of mangrove swamp from 10 to 60 miles wide; (2) north of this, a zone from 50 to 100 miles wide of tropical rain forest and oil palm bush; (3) the high, relatively dry central plateau of open woodland and savannah covering the greater part of the northern region; and (4) the extreme north, where semidesert conditions exist. The central plateau rises in places to between 6,000 and 7,000 feet, but there are no significant mountains.

Nigeria has several navigable rivers, notably the Niger, the Benue, and the Cross. The country has no important lakes, but the extensive lagoons of the south coastal area play a major part in transportation and in the economic activity of the area.

Two seasons, a dry and a wet, are well marked over most of Nigeria. The north's dry season, from October to April, is usually made dusty by Sahara winds. In the south this season runs from November to April, with little desert wind effect. Rainfall varies from 150 inches per year on the coast to 25 inches or less in the extreme north.

THE PEOPLE

Nigeria, with an estimated population of over 55 million people, according to preliminary census figures released in February 1964, contains literally hundreds of different tribal groups, many of which speak unrelated languages. The results of the recently completed census, when published, will provide a more accurate count of the country's population.

Although tribal divisions are not, for the most part, racial divisions, the presence of a large number of tribes in Nigeria is important because it makes for cultural heterogeneity. The dominant tribes in the Northern Region speak a common language, Hausa, and have a common religion, Islam. The single most numerous tribe is the Hausa. The second most numerous tribe in the north, the Fulani, provides the hereditary rulers, the Emirs, but the majority of the Fulani are still nomadic cattle herders.

The Yoruba of the Western Region are a more closely knit tribe than the Hausa. The traditional political organization of the Yoruba is the city (usually village) state, ruled by an oba or king. Many Yoruba are Moslems due to the historic influence of the southernmost Northern Emirate at Ilorin. Yorubaland was the first to come under British rule and has the longest tradition of Christianity.

A fourth region—Midwestern Nigeria—has recently been created. The new region comprises the non-Yoruba peoples of Benin and Delta Provinces, formerly part of Western Nigeria.

The majority of the Eastern Region are Ibo. They are a vigorous, self-assertive, progressive people who have rapidly increased their influence in trade, clerical work, and professions in the other two regions in recent years. Minority peoples in Eastern Nigeria include the Efik and the Eastern Ijaws.

GOVERNMENT

Nigeria has a Federal form of government and a written constitution. It has a parliamentary government based on the British model, with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet chosen from the national legislature. The constitution provides for a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary, and a bill of rights. Nigeria severed its relationship with the British Crown on October 1, 1963, proclaimed itself a Federal Republic, and changed the title of the head of state from Governor General to President, with the functions of the office remaining essentially the