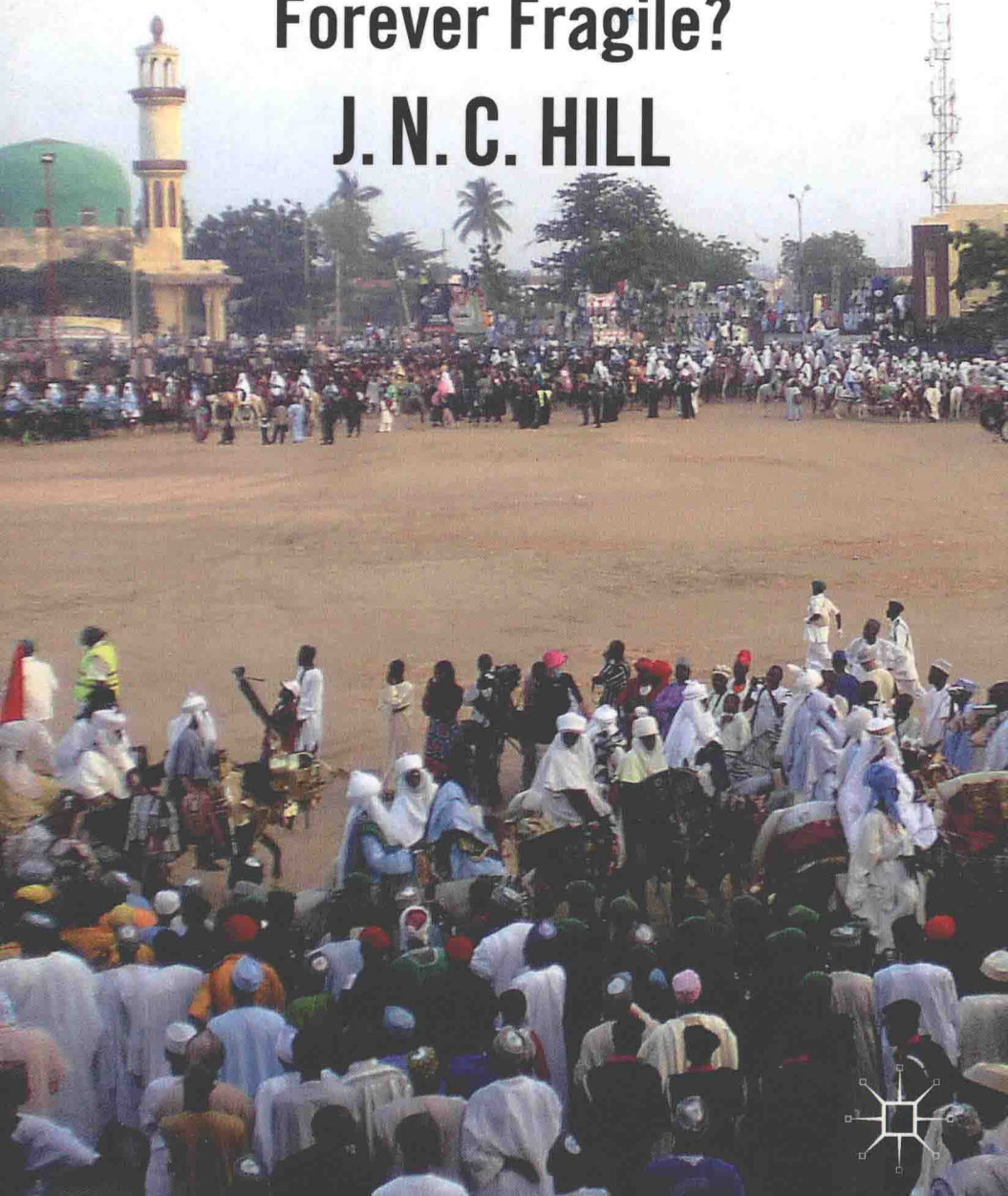


# NIGERIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE

Forever Fragile?

J. N. C. HILL



# Nigeria Since Independence

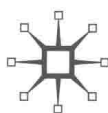
Forever Fragile?

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# Foreword

The modern history of Nigeria is a story of conflict, corruption and simmering ethnic tensions. Added to this combustible mix are religious differences which, in recent times, have led to sporadic outbursts of violence.

Yet, despite these immense strains, modern Nigeria remains a united country. It has a distinctive character, and it is often described as a nascent superpower. Jon Hill's book is a much needed and subtle appraisal of the manner in which modern Nigeria has avoided fracture.

After independence in 1960, Nigeria's federal constitution almost immediately succumbed to secessionism. The Biafra war, which started in 1967, is perhaps the defining event of modern Nigerian history. In many ways, it was the first war of the modern media era. International pop stars, Swedish students, international aid agencies all made their contribution in different ways to the conflict. The civil war has also been represented in literature and film. Today, the tensions which gave rise to the civil war have been superseded by other controversies.

The continued existence of Nigeria as a unified state is a frequent matter of debate and speculation. In his penetrating book, Hill identifies three principal causes which have ensured the unity of this diverse state. The three causes in general terms can be characterised as federalism, oil and the armed forces. Federalism is perhaps the most difficult of these notions to grasp, given its ambivalent nature. It is often remarked that the diversity of Nigeria is, in itself, a source of both weakness and strength.)

The very term 'Nigeria' first appeared in print in an editorial written for *The Times* in London in April 1897. This fact alone showed the extent to which Nigeria itself was an artificial construct. It had only been in 1892 that Lord Salisbury, the British prime minister, had observed that 'we have been engaged in drawing lines upon maps where no white man's foot has ever trod; we have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the

small impediment that we never knew exactly where the mountains and rivers and lakes were.'

Despite this artificiality, federalism does still have a resonance among the political elite. Many Nigerians feel a particular affinity to their region or ethnic group, while maintaining a significant sense of nationhood. This sense has been deepened by the enormous oil wealth which Nigeria commands. Oil damages the environment and encourages insurgency. Yet oil contributes to the nation's unity as non-oil producing regions remain fully committed to preserving Nigeria on account of its oil wealth.

Above this simmering cauldron, so to speak, sit the armed forces, which remain the most visible symbol of national unity. The contribution of the Army, in particular, to Nigeria's political life since 1960 has been enormous. The number of coups which have occurred since independence, as well as the civil war itself, is proof of this.

There remains a question about how the Army will accommodate itself to civilian rule in the future, although recent developments, particularly the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan, show that some form of directly elected leadership can be sustained.

The future of Nigeria is of enormous consequence to the stability of Africa and to international politics generally. The economic development of Africa has been one of the most conspicuous features of the international scene in the past ten years. As developed economies struggled in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, political commentators, economic and financial analysts have become aware of markets outside Europe and North America, notably in the Middle East, Asia and, most recently, in sub-Saharan Africa.

If it remains a united country, Nigeria's position and role in this new world will be significant. If the country falls apart, however, it is difficult to see how this chaotic situation would resolve itself. In either case, the future of Nigeria is one in which politicians, academics, commentators and analysts all over the world should maintain a considerable interest. Jon Hill's book is an important contribution for all those wishing to develop that interest.

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*Britain's Legacies in the Modern World (2012)*

# Acknowledgements

'There are three secrets', declared Somerset Maugham, 'to writing a novel. Unfortunately nobody knows what they are.' No such mysteries, however, surround the production of academic texts. And just as crucial to this bitter-sweet process as thinking, reading, research and writing is the help and support provided by friends and well-wishers, colleagues and peers. It is with profound sincerity, therefore, that I would like to thank all those who have assisted me in writing this book. For individually and collectively they have improved it beyond measure and deserve nothing but credit. Whatever mistakes remain or shortcomings the book still has are due to me and me alone.

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# Abbreviations

AG	Action Group
ANPP	All Nigeria People's Party
AQILBS	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Lands beyond the Sahel
ASUU	Academic Staff Union of Universities
AU	African Union
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
DOE	Department of Energy
DP	Dynamic Party
DPR	Department of Petroleum Resources
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
FCB	Fourth Commando Brigade
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FEPA	Federal Environmental Protection Agency
FG	Federal Government
GIA	Armed Islamic Group
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IBB	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICISS	International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
IMN	Islamic Movement in Nigeria
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
JTF	Joint Task Force
KPP	Kano People's Party
LSUF	Lagos State United Front
MASSOB	Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MDF	Mid-West Democratic Front
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MIR	Movement for the Islamic Revival
MOPOL	Mobile Police

MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NBA	Nigerian Bar Association
NACOD	Nigerian Army Central Ordinance Depot
NCNC	National Council of Nigerian Citizens/National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
NCS	National Council of State
NDC	Niger Delta Congress
NDPVF	Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force
NDVF	Niger Delta Vigilante Force
NEPU	Northern Elements Progressive Union
NNA	Nigerian National Alliance
NNDP	Nigerian National Democratic Party
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NPF	Northern Progressive Front
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
OAS	Organisation Armée Secrète [Secret Army Organisation]
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDP	People's Democratic Party
RP	Republic Party
SSI	Strategic Studies Institute
SSS	State Security Service
UMBC	United Middle Belt Congress
UN	United Nations
UPGA	United Progressive Grand Alliance
ZCP	Zamfara Commoners Party



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# Introduction

Nigeria has long been stalked by failure. From the moment it achieved independence its demise was predicted. Its name was not coined until the late nineteenth century and was not some ancient title brought back to life by either a colonial officer with an eye to the past or an enthusiastic nationalist eager to reassert an ancient heritage. Rather it was the invention of a journalist who went on to marry the man who became its first Governor-General.<sup>1</sup> Even then, it originally did not apply to all the lands it was eventually to cover.<sup>2</sup> From the beginning it was a partial name imposed from without on just some of the fragmented territories over which the British held sway.<sup>3</sup>

Nigeria did not become a single political entity until 1 January 1914.<sup>4</sup> The disparate terrains it came to include were home to a bewildering array of ethnic groups. Never before had they all shared one government.<sup>5</sup> And colonial rule did much to perpetuate and extend the divisions between them. The flimsiness of the cultural, linguistic and religious links between these communities stood in stark contrast to the strength of those they shared with the inhabitants of neighbouring countries. Hausa in the north were bound far more tightly to their kin in Niger and Cameroon than they were to the Ijaw in the south-south.<sup>6</sup> And Yoruba in the south-west looked to Benin and Ghana before Kano and Sokoto.

That Nigeria is a failed state is now beyond doubt – present tense not future. It is a failed state for two main reasons. First, the writ of its government does not run the length and breadth of its territory. There are places in the Niger Delta and in and around the north-eastern city of Maiduguri that lie beyond the direct and continuous control

of the federal, state and local governments. These areas are controlled instead by a range of insurgent groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF) and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) in the Niger Delta, and Boko Haram in the north-east.

△ Nigeria is also a failed state because its government does not promote the flourishing of all its citizens. It does not provide all Nigerians with the public goods or social services they have a reasonable right to expect to receive including law and order, basic health care, primary education and impartial justice. By failing to provide these services the government is not only compromising the quality of life of millions of Nigerians today but it is also denying them crucial opportunities to improve their lot and that of their families tomorrow. It is undermining their standards of living and damaging their potential to improve them.

Despite being a failed state, Nigeria has avoided breaking up. It has, of course, come close to doing so on a number of occasions most notably during the civil war when the south-eastern province of Biafra seceded from the federation for around two-and-a-half years before its eventual, forcible readmission. Yet, in this instance, as on all other occasions, enough people had sufficient resolve to see off the threat and prevent the country's disintegration. The determination to ensure Nigeria's survival was greater than that seeking its demise. But is this still the case today? Are the forces keeping the country together stronger than those tearing it apart? How long can this struggle continue for? How long will Nigeria remain a unified failed state?

There is, of course, a close relationship between state failure and secessionism. Secessionism – the desire of a particular province or region to either establish itself as an independent state or to become part of another state – can be either a cause or an effect of failure. Somalia has experienced both types of secession over the past two decades. Its failure was first triggered in 1991 by the unilateral declaration of independence made by the leaders of, what had been, British Somaliland. And its failure and break up was compounded when Puntland's leaders declared that it too was an independent state in 1998. British Somaliland's secession helped cause Somalia's failure while Puntland's secession was made possible and desirable by it.

Scarcely has the need for answers to these questions been so great, as Nigeria is becoming more, not less, failed. This much is confirmed by its steady rise up the Fund for Peace's Failed State Index rankings. In the 2011 and 2010 indexes,<sup>7</sup> Nigeria was identified as the fourteenth most failed state in the world. In 2009, however, it was considered the fifteenth most failed state,<sup>8</sup> in 2008 the nineteenth,<sup>9</sup> in 2007 the seventeenth,<sup>10</sup> in 2006 the twenty-second,<sup>11</sup> and in 2005 the fifty-fourth.<sup>12</sup> In just six years, therefore, the country has climbed 40 places in the Fund's index and is now grouped with such acknowledged basket cases as Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan.

The Fund for Peace's findings are contributing to the urgent debates currently taking place in Abuja, Washington, London and Brussels over Nigeria's short-term future. Can the country remain united despite its growing failure? Is the popular and political resolve to keep it together as strong today as it was in the past? And is the state still able to resist and defeat those forces which are threatening to tear it asunder?

Nigeria's failure is already a major cause for concern. The country's National Bureau of Statistics recently announced that, as of 2010, 60.9 per cent of all Nigerians were living in absolute poverty compared to 54.7 per cent in 2004.<sup>13</sup> This increase represents a near doubling of the total number of people living in poverty from 68.7 million in 2004 to 112.47 million in 2010.<sup>14</sup> The mass human suffering denoted by these figures is both a cause and an effect of Nigeria's failure. For it not only highlights the state's failure to promote the flourishing of all its citizens, but it also helps explain the origins of the anger and desperation fuelling the insurgencies in the Niger Delta and north-east. Nigeria's failure is of grave concern, therefore, for both humanitarian and security reasons.

Yet it is feared that even these immense problems would be dwarfed by those which could be generated by the country's break up. First, there would be the disruption to whatever few public goods and services the state currently provides. Second, there would likely be inter-communal violence and the accompanying mass migration of people around the country and away from it. Third, there would be the exposure of the nearby failing states of Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Sierra Leone to the highly destructive political, economic and humanitarian shockwaves released.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, there would be the

loss of Nigeria's contributions to the African Union/United Nations sponsored peacekeeping forces currently operating around Africa. And fifth, there would be the disruption of the flow of Niger Delta oil onto the international market and the concomitant spike in global energy prices. Nigeria's disintegration would be a local, regional and global disaster.

The aim of this book, therefore, is to offer some answers to these most urgent questions. More specifically, the book focuses on both the factors fuelling the insurgencies in the Niger Delta and the north-east and the main mechanisms helping to keep the country together. It does so for two reasons. First, the existence and activities of these factions are the main cause of Nigeria's failure as a state. Through the force of their arms and the appeal of their political messages, these groups have created spaces, places on the map, in which the writ of the Federal Government does not run. Only by better understanding the insurgencies can we better understand the causes, extent and complexion of Nigeria's failure.

This examination has two additional benefits. The first is that it highlights many of the ways in which the Federal Government is failing to promote the flourishing of all its citizens. For the growth of these insurgency groups is intimately bound to the state's prolonged failure to provide its people with the basic public goods they can reasonably expect to receive. Put another way, these factions were founded in anger and frustration at the state's inability to do what it ought to. Moreover, at least some of the support they command is the result of the promises their leaders have made to improve this provision once they are in power. They have sworn to do what the state cannot.

The second benefit of this examination is that it identifies the origins and maps the extent of the secessionist pressures currently being exerted on Nigeria. The MEND, the NDVF and the NDPVF are all fighting to win independence for some or all of the various ethnic groups who inhabit the six states that make up the Niger Delta sub-region.<sup>16</sup> They are waging their armed campaigns to break up Nigeria. Indeed, their campaigns not only highlight the intimate relationship between state failure and territorial integrity but also confirm the seriousness of the threat to the country's continued unity. And there are other organisations seeking to win autonomy for this or that community by peaceful means.

The second reason the book focuses on the factors fuelling the insurgencies and the main mechanisms helping to keep the country together is to cast some much needed light on the likelihood of Nigeria breaking up. Certainly the book makes no predictions as to what the future will look like or claims as to its ability to do so. But by identifying and analysing these mechanisms, what they are and how they work, the book draws attention to what currently matters and helps highlight those critical agencies and institutions which hold the key to whether Nigeria stays together or not.

The picture of Nigeria's failure painted by this examination is full of paradoxes. For some of the main factors fuelling the insurgencies in the Niger Delta and north-east also double as vital mechanisms for keeping the country together. The book concentrates on three of the most important factors/mechanisms, namely, federalism (the process of building and developing Nigeria's state structures and political practices), oil and its associated revenue (generated by the rents the Federal Government charges oil companies and its sale on the international market) and the armed forces (its operations and activities, and as a major institution of the Nigerian state).

The contributions made by federalism, oil and the armed forces to the country's failure fall into two broad categories. The first comprises of those actions which inspire an insurgent group directly. These contributions either give succour to a faction (persuade them that their cause is just and that victory is possible), or antagonise them sufficiently to reaffirm their commitment to their campaign (fortify their resolve and determination to act). The second category includes those contributions which undermine the state's ability to promote the flourishing of its citizens. These contributions strike at the government's provision of public goods, at its ability to maintain law and order, to offer basic health care and primary education and to provide fair and impartial justice to all Nigerians.

There are four main ways in which federalism, oil and the armed forces are resisting Nigeria's failure and also helping it to preserve its integrity. First, they are countering the insurgents. In different ways and to varying degrees these mechanisms are resisting and combating the groups which are driving the country's failure. Second, they are strengthening the state. They are buttressing and rehabilitating its institutions and agencies and improving its operation thereby enhancing its ability to provide Nigerians with the public goods

they are due. Third, they are helping to build a nation. They are promoting ideas of nationhood and inculcating in the population a loyalty to the nation above and beyond those to kith, kin, locale and religion and which are the mainstay of secessionism.<sup>17</sup> Fourth, they are facilitating the pursuit of self-interest. They are helping select groups within society to advance their interests and, in so doing, persuade them that they have more to gain from Nigeria remaining intact than they do from it breaking up.

Some of the ways in which these mechanisms are combating failure and preserving Nigeria's unity are self-defeating. The corrupt practices engaged in by many politicians, state functionaries and military personnel are a major reason why Boko Haram is waging its armed campaign, commands the support that it does, and the government is unable to promote the flourishing of all its citizens. Encouraging certain groups to exploit Nigeria's unity so that they might advance their interests at the expense of everyone else may be helping to keep the country together, but it is also contributing to Nigeria's failure. Even so, at certain times and in certain ways these mechanisms help preserve Nigeria's unity in all these fashions. That their roles can be contradictory emphasises the paradoxical nature of Nigeria's failure.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first outlines the understanding of state failure it adopts. The chapter explains how changes to the international moral environment ushered in by the Second World War led to the establishment of a new sovereignty regime. This new regime resulted in the creation of many states in Africa, including Nigeria, which did not have the necessary capabilities to exercise *de facto* sovereignty but which, nevertheless, continued to be recognised by the international community. The second chapter then maps the contours of Nigeria's failure specifically. It pays particular attention to the activities of the various insurgent groups currently operating there and the ways in which the Federal Government is failing to promote the flourishing of all its citizens. Finally the chapter looks at the scale of the threat to Nigeria's unity posed by secessionist movements.

After explaining what state failure is and why Nigeria is a failed state, the next three chapters each examine a core cause of the country's failure and important mechanism for its continued unity. Chapter 3 focuses on federalism and the ways in which it has simultaneously



encouraged political corruption, which is helping to drive the insurgencies, and diluted the regional loyalties which posed such a danger to the country's integrity. Chapter 4 then looks at oil and the revenues generated by its sale to show how it is fuelling the insurgencies in the Niger Delta and the secessionist demands made by these factions as well as fortifying the determination of the rest of the country to stop the Delta from breaking away. Finally Chapter 5 examines the armed forces and how they are fighting to keep Nigeria whole but are doing so in ways that are driving the insurgencies.

This analysis leads the book to arrive at three main conclusions. The first is that, despite decades of failure, Nigeria continues to avoid disintegration. Second, that Nigeria is likely to remain failed for the foreseeable future. And third, that much greater precision is needed when applying terms like failed and failing. In this way, Nigeria informs the book's analysis of state failure, just as the debate on state failure informs the book's examination of Nigeria.