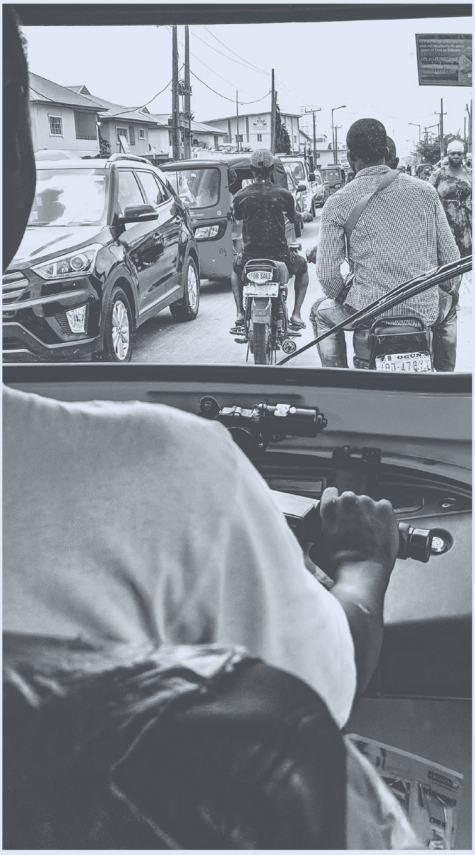
MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL AFRICA

The Political Economy of Banditry in Nigeria



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Published in partnership with the African Studies and Research Forum

Series Editor: Abdul Karim Bangura

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The Political Economy of Banditry in Nigeria

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83708-077-9 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83708-076-2 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83708-078-6 (Epub)

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Almighty Allah (SWT) for giving us the courage, wisdom, energy and time to write this work as a contribution to resolving one of the most vexing conflicts plaguing our communities. We also salute the Messenger of Allah Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Our sincere thanks go to the entire production team at Emerald Publishing Group for overseeing this project. In particular, our thanks go to the Senior Commissioning Editor, Emerald, Katy Mathers, who welcomed our ideas and facilitated the process of proposal and review. Thanks to her guidance, support and courage, the project was realised. We are very grateful to the Editor of the *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Global Africa* series, Professor Abdul Karim Bangura, American University Centre for Global Peace, USA, for his critical review of our proposal and his valuable suggestions and for his generosity in including our manuscript in his book series. We also thank Lydia Cutmore, Senior Content Development Editor, Emerald, and Brindha Thirunavukkarasu of the Emerald Publishing Group production team for their great work. This editorial team helped immensely in making the book project run smoothly, quickly and easily from start to finish. We say a big thank you.

We would like to thank the reviewers who sacrificed their precious time to contribute to the improvement of the manuscript with their valuable and insightful comments. We would like to thank Professor Noah Echa Attah, Department of African Historical Studies, National University of Lesotho, for his kind support, guidance and valuable suggestions. We would also like to express our appreciation for the extensive support we have received from the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the National University of Lesotho, which has made the writing of the manuscript convenient and possible. The entire staff of the department deserves our recognition and appreciation. We are grateful to Dr Ibrahim Sani Kankara of the Department of Sociology, Bayero University, Kano; Dr Abdullahi Abubakar of the Department of Sociology, Al Qalam University, Katsina; Dr Ibrahim Kawuley Mika'il, Institute of Transport Technology, Zaria, Kaduna State; Dr Sulaiman Iguda, Department of Geography, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina State; Dr Dikko; Dr Yahuza Getso; Detective Auwal Bala Durumin Iya and many others for their valuable contributions.

We would also like to thank Sheikh Murtala Assada Sokoto, Sheikh Yusuf Musa Asadus Sunnah and various other security forces, civil society members, community members and other stakeholders who contributed in various ways with information, logistics and other information to make the book project possible and successful.

We would like to extend our respect, prayers and appreciation to our parents, family members and well-wishers who remain patient, supportive and always encourage us to work hard and contribute to societal development.

Chapter 1

General Introduction

Introduction

This chapter sets out the general background to the study, including the main issues identified and addressed in this book. The main aims of the book, the methodology used and the organisational plan of the book. To facilitate the introduction to the main topics covered in the book, this chapter discusses the basic issues that guide the reader and familiarise him or her with the antecedents that led to the phenomenon discussed here. To this end, the background of the Nigerian state is discussed. The Nigerian state has passed through three major historical eras, each of which has shaped and reshaped the political economy of the country. These historical periods are the pre-colonial era before the formation of a single state in the Nigerian territory, the colonial period that determined the modern destiny of Nigeria as a state, and a post-colonial period that comprises the present status. This chapter also briefly and succinctly explains the basics of the Nigerian political economy. In addition, the chapter discusses the Nigerian security crises as an adjunct to the emergence of the Nigerian state since 1960. The Nigerian security crises are multi-layered, confrontational, nefarious and evasive and are assuming new dimensions. Since the attainment of political independence, Nigeria has not known a stable and secure environment as numerous security threats emerge, disappear, re-emerge and change their patterns. Knowing the causes, nature, dimensions and other factors associated with security crises in Nigeria will help in understanding the focus and content of this book.

Background of Nigerian State: Pre-colonial, Colonial and Post-colonial Epochs

The Nigerian state passes through three major historical epochs: the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial. Each of the three eras has its own socio-cultural, economic and political structures that differ from the others. Before the British conquered and took possession of the territory now known as Nigeria, there were a variety of kingdoms, chiefdoms, societies and other socio-political organisations with different shapes, sizes, cultures and activities. Some of the pre-colonial political

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doi:10.1108/978-1-83708-076-220251001

organisations are so large that they are bigger than more than 10 or more European countries combined today (Siollun, 2021). For example, the Borno Empire stretched from the desert areas in Damagaram to Azare-Misau-Hedejia in some areas that were later taken by Hausa land, to some parts of Chad and Cameroon in the east. The Hausa Kingdom extended into the Nigerien territories of Zinder, parts of Damagaram, central Nigeria and the entire western states of Kano, Katsina, Gobir, Zauzzau, Sokoto, Zamfara, an area five times the size of modern England. Similar kingdoms as large as Kanem Borno flourished in the western parts of Nigeria, such as the Oyo Empire and the Benin Empire, while far to the east and south, some larger societies with a loose and decentralised system operated a less centralised structure, such as the Igbo and the Niger Delta societies (Salamone, 2010).

Politically, the earliest state organisations are centralised and well-structured with a structured political system. Historically, the Kanem Borno Empire existed in the north-east of present-day Nigeria thousands of years before colonisation and the later establishment of the Nigerian state (Mohammed et al., 2006). The Borno Empire was historically created through immigration from the Middle East, where an ethnic group of Kanuri settled in Ngazargamu. The competition for power and influence between Borno and its neighbours led to several attacks by one of the strongest enemies, Bulala, which resulted in migration and relocation of the capital of Ngazargamu to the present capital of Borno (Hiribarren, 2022). Borno grew stronger, expanded and controlled a country larger than many modern states in Africa, Europe and elsewhere. Borno, situated on a strategic Trans-Saharan trade route, became the umbilical cord of trade between the Arab merchants of the Middle East, the North African traders and the great Hausaland and beyond, linking Hausaland with Agades, Timbuktu, Songhai and other West African and Central African states (Siollun, 2021). Through the peaceful adoption of Islam from the North African and Middle Eastern traders, Borno became an important centre of Islamic civilisation and a major hub for the quest for knowledge, especially the memorisation and teaching of the Quran. The acceptance and adoption of Islam as an official religion linked Borno to the Ottoman Empire and enabled the exchange of emissaries with the Ottoman sultans and the rest of the Islamic world. This was the trend until the Sokoto Jihad invaded some parts of Borno from the west in the 19th century; internal power struggles weakened the empire, and colonialism ended the state of Borno (Cartwright, 2019).

The Borno Empire was politically organised in a monarchical system with the Mai, the king, as the supreme executive under the Sefawa Dynasty, who was supported by a 'Council of Twelve', a group of dignitaries all chosen from the royal family. Mai ascends the throne through a hereditary process. The Council of Twelve is the executive council, which must be consulted by the Mai before making a critical decision and is given other responsibilities such as the administration of the economy, state policy, war, religious affairs, diplomacy, trade and foreign policy (Hiribarren, 2016). Geographically, Borno lies on the axis of Lake Chad, one of the largest lakes in Africa and the world. Economically, Borno developed through trade from the Trans-Sahara to the far east and Hausaland. A large part of the population works in agriculture, fishing and trade. Borno received tribute and taxes from the vassal states and generated revenue internally from mineral

and water resources, which were taxed by the sedentary nomads who bred livestock (Lange, 1993).

Neighbouring Borno is Hausaland. Hausaland is as large or larger than Borno, which also traces its foundation to migration from the Middle East. The Hausa Kingdom is the largest empire that stretched from the 11th to the 19th century across the northern part of Nigeria to Gongola in the east, Damagaram in the north, central Nigeria in the west and some areas in Borno. The Hausa states, popularly so called because there were several independent strong states such as Gobir, Zazzau, Sokoto, Kano, Rano, Daura, Zamfara and Katsina, are considered and classified as a single entity because of a common language, faith, culture and social organisation. Sometimes one of the states rose above the others in influence and power, controlling trade and political direction, while in other times, some of them were equally powerful and vied for control (Hill, 1972).

The Hausa states have a well-structured and centralised administrative system similar to today's strong federalist presidential system. At the top of the source of power is inheritance. The King (Sarki) is the supreme executive officer with unrivalled powers to decide unchallenged on political, economic, administrative and diplomatic matters. However, he has many advisors who influence him. The waziri (grand vizier), for example, modelled on the old German and Ottoman viziers, is the second man at the top. He supervises, administers, represents, decides and advises the king. Sometimes he acts on behalf of the king (Sarki) in urgent or even critical matters. There is the 'Sarkin Fada' (Chief of Staff) who coordinates the activities of the palace. The 'Galadima' (mayor of the city) manages the affairs of the city and the royal functions. The 'Sarkin Yaki' is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The 'Magatakarda' (secretary) fulfils the same duties as any secretary in a state today. The 'Ma'aji' is the treasurer, while the 'Sarkin Dogarai' is the chief of police. The 'Alkali', a word borrowed from the Arabic 'Al-Qadi', is the chief judge. There are several other titles, more than 100, held by royal sons and other assistants appointed by the king (Miles, 1994). The Hausa Kingdom is organised into cities, provinces, districts, precincts and villages, each headed by an appointed representative (Salamone, 2010). This well-organised administrative system was noted with reverence by the British colonial rulers, who confirmed and maintained the status quo by introducing a system of indirect rule, as Coleman (1971) notes.

The main economic mainstay of the Hausa states, or the Hausa Kingdom, was subsistence farming, as the area is a fertile land suitable for agricultural activities. Farmers cultivated grains such as maize, millet, cereals, wheat, rice, peanuts, beans, vegetables, onions and spices. In addition, there are a considerable number of herdsmen known as Fulani among the Hausa Kingdom. These Fulani groups are both wanderers and settlers. Many of them are natives of Hausa land, and they share so many characteristics and cultures with the Hausa that the two groups were given the name Hausa/Fulani through intermarriage and intercultural homogeneity. The reason for this is the indivisibility and permeability of the two groups in all areas. The Fulani are cattle breeders and herders. Besides fishing, trade and crafts are other economic activities in pre-colonial Hausaland (Robinson, 1896).

Like the Borno Empire, the Hausa Kingdom maintained long-standing foreign relations and diplomacy many centuries before colonisation. The famous Trans-Saharan Trade flourished between the Hausa states and the West, Central and North African states as far as the Middle East. In the course of this trading partnership, Islam was introduced to the land of the Hausa by the Arab merchants. These Arab merchants, who came to Hausaland to buy grain, spices, vegetables, livestock and other products, sold their exotic goods, such as soap, carpets, mirrors and other luxury goods, in return. As the Arab merchants practised their religion, the Hausa, who were previously traditionalists, embraced Islam (Kane, 2016). Some states, such as Kano, made Islam official under the rule of Muhammadu Rumfa. Muhammadu Rumfa organised pilgrimages to the Holy Land in Makka and sponsored scholars from North Africa and the Middle East to open madrasas (Islamic schools) in Kano and other Hausa lands (Kurfi, 2022).

An important turning point in the emergence and spread of Islam in Hausaland is the Sokoto Jihad in the 19th century. The Sokoto Jihad, led by Sheikh Usman Bin Fodio, was not the introduction of Islam into Hausaland or the imposition of Islam on non-Muslims, as is sometimes misrepresented in the literature. Before the Sokoto Jihad, Islam existed in Hausaland for an estimated 1,000 years, according to Ibraheem (1987), Last (1967) and Kane (2016). Almost all kings or emirs embraced Islam, and Islam was officially recognised in the palaces (Ibraheem, 1986). However, inspired by his teacher, Sheikh Jibrilla, Sheikh Usman Bin Fodio believed that many things in the administration of justice went against Islamic teachings (Zehnle, 2020). The emirs, in collaboration with some palace clerics, blackmailed the Muslims and non-Muslims through unreasonable taxation, injustice, oppression, confiscation and other forms of undesirable innovations that had no jurisprudential basis in Islam. Sheikh Usman Bin Fodio set about the difficult task of combating these undesirable innovations and injustices against the rulers and the palace clerics (Last, 2014). In response, the rulers attacked Sheikh Usman Bin Fodio with all their might and all his followers. The Sheikh and his followers were tortured, massacred, brutalised and forced into exile in Gobir, a town near Sokoto. Faced with threats from all sides, the Sheikh mobilised his followers and fought back against the oppression, which historically is now the Sokoto Jihad (Ibraheem, 1987). The Sokoto Jihad extended to some parts of Damagaram and Zinder in the north, to the areas of influence of the Borno Empire in the east, to the Gongola Basin and the Muri areas in Cameroon, and to central Nigeria and some parts of Ilorin in the west. The consequences of the Jihad led to the formation of a large Islamic state in West Africa, which was administered strictly according to the Islamic legal system (Smaldone, 1977).

There are also a number of pre-colonial kingdoms in northcentral Nigeria, including the Tiv Kingdom, the Jukun Kingdom or Korarrafa, the Nupe Kingdom and the Igala Kingdom (Gunn & Conant, 2017). These kingdoms have some similar characteristics to the kingdoms of Borno and Hausa. They are relatively small and geographically located in central Nigeria. The northcentral states have the same socio-political and economic system as the Hausa and Borno states, with the exception of religious belief, where a significant percentage of the population were followers of traditional religions with a considerable proportion of Muslims

before the emergence of Christian missionaries and formal colonisation (Poster, 2001). These smaller states developed a strong political importance and a defence system that made them independent from the neighbouring powerful states of Borno, Hausa, Yoruba and Benin. Although they looked like an alliance, they had a loose autonomy and often became embroiled in the struggle for supremacy typical of the Hausa states (Pratten, 2007). In these religiously traditional states, Islam reached the areas before the Sokoto Jihad, but gained prominence during the Jihad, while Christianity emerged during the colonial period (Ochonu, 2014).

In the distant tropical forests west of the northern kingdoms, there were strong political organisations. One of them is the Oyo Empire. Like the Hausa and Borno Kingdoms, the Oyo Kingdom was a centralised, well-structured and organised political system with a clear separation of powers that resembled the modern presidential system in terms of specificity, checks and balances. The Oyo Empire, which stretched from the borders of Ilorin in the north to the Bay of Bonny in the west-east and Benin in the south, is one of the oldest political organisations in pre-colonial Nigeria (Johnson, 1966). The empire was headed by the Alaafin, who was appointed by the Oyo-Mesi. The Oyo-Mesi were the legislators and had the power to check the excesses of the Alaafin by asking him to vacate office through a suicide trial. This is done by presenting a calabash that reads 'abdicate by suicide'. Together with his eldest son, Bashorun, he commits suicide. There are other strong and influential offices, such as those of the Hausa and Borno, such as the 'Are-Ona Kakanfo', who was the commander of the army, 'Bashorun' (crown prince), 'Ilaris' (wives of Alaafin) and others (Akintoye, 2010). This consolidated political structure and economic strength led the empire to its greatness over many centuries. With unhindered access to the sea, activities in the hinterland, agriculture, trade in slaves and other raw materials, the Yoruba empire secured economic prosperity and political strength (Adebanwi, 2014).

Another organised and centralised political organisation in pre-colonial Nigeria is the Benin Empire. Highly praised for its advanced civilisation and development in pre-colonial Nigeria, the Benin Empire occupied an area between the Oyo West and the loose political units to the east and south in the tropical hinterland. Rodney (1972, p. 73) quotes a Dutch explorer who visited the Benin Empire in the 14th century and said that he had 'never seen such a lively city with well-ornamented structures and clearly defined streets lit with street lamps as Benin City'. The Benin Empire was ruled by an 'Oba' (king). The Oba, like the 'Mai' in Borno and the Alaafin in Oyo or even the Sarki in the Hausa Kingdoms, was supported by the 'Usama Council', which was the kingmaker responsible for appointing the king. The Benin Kingdom is organised into divisions, and there are city chiefs, provincial governors and other delegates who are all appointed by the Oba with the approval of the Usama Council (Docherty, 2021). Like its counterparts in pre-colonial Nigeria, the Benin Kingdom flourished in the slave trade, commerce, arts and crafts, trade, agriculture and small-scale industries. The kingdom produced beautiful bronzes, terracotta and other works of art. Several architectural works, such as bronzes, terracotta and other beautiful, ornate works of art in Benin, were stolen by the British. Recently, the British government has pledged to return some of these artworks to the Nigerian state (Hicks, 2020).

Both the Kingdom of Oyo and the Kingdom of Benin were traditionally religious societies until the advent of Islam in Yorubaland and later Christianity before the colonial era and during colonisation (Philips, 2021).

In the neighbourhood of the Benin and Oyo empires, there were loosely decentralised states, some larger, some smaller. The largest is the Igbo society. Igbo society was a typical democratic system ruled on the basis of representation by elders. At the village level, the elders of the households represented the decision making. At the town level, village elders were involved in decision making (Afigbo, 1981). In pre-colonial Igbo society, there were offices for village title holders known as council of elders, the 'Ozo' title holders who were the popular and wealthy members of the society, and the 'Age Grade', who were mostly youths (Orji, 2010). The social life of Igbo society was guided by oracle consultations in a traditional process, and several important judgements were made on the basis of such decisions (Harneit-Sievers, 2006). Closer to Igbo society were smaller, looser states in the riverine areas of the delta. Some small groups of ethnic organisations, including Ijaw, Urhobo, Efik, Itsekiri, Ibibio and a host of others, were governed similarly to the Igbo. The main economic activities of these societies were agriculture, fishing, palm oil production, trade, manufacturing and commerce (Dike, 1966). The majority of the inhabitants of Igboland and the Niger Delta were traditionalists but later adopted Christianity. Islam was not recognised in these areas until the early 19th century (Uchendu, 2011, 2018).

All these pre-colonial political organisations were autonomous but highly interdependent. The relationships between them were characterised by conflict, co-operation and competition. Sometimes they even competed with each other between the Hausa states and the Delta states. The high level of intermarriage between the groups, trade, migration and other activities meant that these societies became multicultural and closely interrelated. However, conflicts and wars of conquest sometimes occurred, resulting in many states being conquered by others. This was the birth of slavery and the slave trade, especially in southern Nigeria, as this was less common in the pre-colonial areas of northern Nigeria. In other cases, they co-operated for security, trade partnership, political alliance, reunification and other mutual benefits (Campbell & Page, 2018).

The fate of these political entities was truncated and altered by contact with the British colonial exploiters. But the emergence of British colonialism was not the first contact between the states in what is now Nigerian territory and the outside world, especially Europe. Rodney (1972) mentions the 14th-century Dutch explorer who visited Benin and praised the development he saw. Christian missionaries, first the Portuguese, also visited the Nigerian territory as early as the 15th century but were ostracised by intense, deadly mosquitoes and unfavourable, harsh weather that left them with incurable diseases (Kolapo, 2019). There was a long period of slave trade in the coastal areas of Lagos, Calabar and other southern areas for over two centuries by Europeans as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Ajayi & Uya, 2010). But the British colonial adventure was completely different from the other visits by Europeans. Firstly, the 18th-century visit led to the establishment of colonial rule.

The British agent was the Royal Niger Company under the leadership of Sir George Goldie, which took control of mining, palm oil and other important

trading licences and trade in the southern parts of Nigeria. Siollun (2021) mentions that the scale of the atrocities committed by Sir George Goldie was so great that he burnt his diary as he was dying and instructed his family and employees never to give or publish an interview about his activities in southern Nigeria. Sir George Goldie paved the way for formal British colonisation. According to some historical accounts (Coleman, 1971; Crowder, 1978), the British annexed Lagos as the first colonised territory. Colonisation in the south was not as peaceful as many had expected. The people resisted, especially some kings, such as King Kosoko of Lagos, King Nana of Itsekiri and King Jaja of Opobo. Both the rulers and their followers were violently conquered, suppressed and forced to submit to British rule.

After the British colonialists had conquered the south, they advanced to the north, and by 1902 all the aforementioned territories and states were under British rule. Like their southern counterparts, the northern territories also tried to resist. Sultan Attahiru, for example, refused to submit to British rule. They pursued him from Sokoto until they reached him in Bormi, a small enclave near Ashaka, now Gombe State in northeast Nigeria. A fierce battle ensued before Sultan Attahiru was subdued by the British. However, the British recognised the cultural and political differences between the north and the south as well as the geographical differences and introduced Indirect Rule in northern Nigeria. This was due to the hierarchy and organisation, which were well established and structured, with an order of command that facilitated subjugation and administration (Geary, 2013).

The turning point of colonialism and the formation of the Nigerian state were in 1914 when the colonial governor, Sir Frederick Lord Lugard, amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates and declared them the British colony of Nigeria (Falola, 2014). Since the artificial creation of the Nigerian state, the colonial territory underwent several changes in political, economic and even socio-cultural terms. Firstly, electoral politics and political parties emerged after the relevant provisions were included in the Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution of 1922. In a gradual process, Nigeria's political form was shaped by the colonial governors, especially Sir Arthur Richard, who divided the Nigerian colony into four regions: Lagos as the centre and the East, North and West regions. This laid the foundation for Nigerian federalism (Whitaker, 2015). The various political changes and constitutional reforms during colonialism set Nigeria on the path to political independence in 1960 under the parliamentary structures of the British Westminster (Carland, 1977). An important development to note during colonial rule in Nigeria is the pattern and systems of nationalist movements which were characterised by ethnic and regional preferences rather than national unity and cohesion. The British colonialist deliberately enforced a union with numerous differences that were difficult to reconcile and unite (Diamond, 1995; Dudley, 1968; Sklar, 1965). This development later affects the entire process of national development in Nigeria up to the present day.

After the negotiation of political independence on 1 October 1960, Nigeria was a melting pot of political and socio-economic crises, with fragile national cohesion, weak political institutions, regional preferences at variance with national unity and ethnic sentiments at variance with national development. The political

chaos that began with the Midwestern crisis of 1963, the bloody coup d'état of January 1966 that led to the end of the First Republic (1960–1966), and the counter-coups sidelined democratisation and prepared the ground for a long-lasting military rule that dominated the first four decades of the Nigerian state. Efforts at renewed democratisation in the Second Republic (1979–1983) were thwarted by the military, and thus prolong the military's stay in power. The attempt to democratise the country only bore fruit in the Fourth Republic (1999–2025), when civilian rule lasted and still lasts. In 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, about seven elections were successfully held without interruption (Akinwunmi-Othman, 2017; Alli, 2010; Larkin, 2008).

The Nigerian state was expected to improve and better itself under a democratic regime, especially a permanent one, in the Fourth Republic. However, the situation has turned out to be otherwise as things keep getting out of hand and myriads of political, socio-economic and other crises are worsening. Nigeria is becoming volatile, vulnerable and prone to security challenges on all fronts. The state is struggling to weather the violent waves of political and economic problems. One critical area is the numerous security crises confronting Nigeria in all geopolitical zones and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. All efforts to counter the crisis proved unsuccessful when the situation escalated. The hitherto celebrated and eagerly awaited democratic dividends turned out to be a democratic curse. That is the logic behind this study. The security crises are too numerous for this book to focus on. One of the debilitating conflicts, banditry in northwestern Nigeria, is emphasised.

The Nigerian Political Economy

The Nigerian political economy has patterns and interesting developments that are worth examining here. Nigeria inherited a parliamentary political system in which the failure of the major regional parties to win a significant majority in 1960 forced a coalition government of the Northern People's Congress and the National Convention for Nigerian Citizens with a president and a prime minister. The three regions of East, North and West were retained, and a fourth, the Midwest, was created in 1963. Lagos remained the federal capital. All regions had regional assemblies represented by proportional representation, and the centre, Lagos, had a national House of Representatives whose members were selected on the basis of population size. This meant that the North had more members based on population. This structure functioned until January 1966, when the bloody and brutal military coup by some Igbo officers against the northern nationalists ended the First Republic (1960–1955) (Gboyega, 2011).

During the First Republic (1999–1966), the main sources of revenue for the regional and central governments were taxes, agricultural produce, trade and commerce. Agricultural products were the main source of foreign exchange earnings. Foreign exchange earnings included palm oil, rubber, cocoa, timber, beans, wheat, peanuts, millet, maize, cotton, sugarcane, yams, cassava, cattle, onions, vegetables, goats and sheep and numerous others. During the entire period from 1953 to 1965, statutory grants from the federal government amounted to at least 56%