

Lesson 2: Politics, Economy and Society in Independent African States

1. Video Lesson

2. Competencies

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Assess the major political, economic and social problems of independent African states.
- Identify the main influences of the western powers on the peoples of Africa;
- Discuss the role of the military in the politics of politically independent Africa.

3. Brainstorming Question

- Why did the African military involve in politics?
- Do you support coups d'état by the military officials against democratically elected but wicked and oppressive presidents? Why?
- What was the major problem in the economy of Africa after independence?

5. Lesson Presentation

Politics in Independent African States

Since the 1960s the major problem in many African countries has been lack of political stability. Most of the French-speaking states, with the notable exception of Guinea, Senegal, and Cote d'Ivoire, went over to military rule during the 1960s. Togo and Dahomey (Benin) have suffered from frequent military coups and counter-coups. From November 1965, coup followed coup with frightening regularity, taking Nigeria and Ghana in early 1966. By the early 1970s, military rule had become a serious African political option. Coup d'état remained the most frequent means of changing government throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Economy and Society in Independent Africa

Throughout the colonial period, Africans were encouraged only to produce raw materials for export. The colonial regimes made little effort to establish factories that would produce manufactured goods. The colonies were made producers of mineral ores for the industries of Europe. In the field of agriculture, Africans were encouraged to specialize in single cash-crop products. The price of such single products in world markets has not been stable. Moreover, their prices were sometimes fixed in the metropolitan countries in accordance with the interests of international monopolies. Thus, whenever prices of such products fell on the world market, African states often faced economic crisis, which in turn became a cause of political instability. Furthermore, the two major factors stifling African development in the 1980s and 1990s were international debt and drought. Thus, the political legacy of colonial rule has a great impact on the development of African countries.

Struggle for Economic Independence

In economic terms, the performance of many African countries has fallen far short of the vision of the leaders of anti-colonial movements. For example, in 1985, 22 countries could not feed their growing populations. Agricultural production in the first part of the 1980s had declined. In contrast, some countries have recorded substantial economic achievements, like Botswana, Algeria, Gabon, and Cote d'Ivoire. For others, however, the exigencies of absolute poverty have continued to shape their existence.