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Firstly, the historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the pre-colonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial period is the time before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria while the colonial period refers to the era that the colonial administration was introduced to Nigeria.

However, Nigeria is a colonial creation because it is a product of European adventures and colonization of Africa. Prior to the creation of the Nigerian state, pre-colonial Nigeria comprises of different separate empires, kingdoms, states, and chiefdoms namely, Borno empire, Hausa states and the Sokoto caliphate in the north, the Igbo society, Benin kingdom and the Oyo empire and other ethnics. The exact time when man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are evidence that man settled in the area now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000-9000BC.

Moreover, the man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment. First, he needed food so his purpose was to hunt the animals and to gather fruits. Then he invented tools consisting of pebbles made in chopping and cutting tools it was first identified by the archaeologists in Tanazia. Early man then proceeded to invent another type of tool, which is a heavy chopper. It was more efficient in cutting than existing tool and it was first seen at Sango Bay on the west shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda. It is noted that there were some advanced technology in various parts of Nigeria during the bronze and metal age. Indeed, one of the most active periods was around 500BC to 200AD.

Furthermore, there were various informations on the major land marks in early Nigeria history and it was made possible through the excavation work done on places where man lived in Nigeria in the past. There were various discoveries of art work in Nigeria; the discovery of terracotta which is the head of monkey was discovered by tin miners in Nok in 1936 which prompted discoveries of other places. But, Benin was known for its important art work, art historians claims that bronze casting was introduced into Benin by an Ife artist. And Ife nevertheless was also important because of its terracotta and bronze heads, objects such as stools and figures were carved on hard stone called quartz while animal and human figures were carved granite and decorated with iron nails. Art historians believe that Ife art originated from Nok art because of the similarities. It was believed that Ife learnt bronze sculpture from Benin. While some bronze objects and ornaments were accidently discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo Ukwu in 1939, many objects made in bronze were discovered in the various sites including the remains of a king and five slaves.

But, we can’t talk about the history of Nigeria without the traditional political system of government. Firstly, the Yorubas are one of the largest ethnic groups and are united by language; they traced their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Ile-Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people but there are different versions of traditions of origin. Oke Oramfe is located in Ile-Ife; it is believed to be the centre from which the world was created and he has his own version of the origin. The political structures in Yoruba kingdom were similar in nature and each town has a king known as Oba who lives in the palace called “Aafin”, the Oba enjoyed many privileges but certain limitation were placed on his powers and there were known as “eewo” and there were made to curb the tyranny on the part of the king. The government of the old Oyo Empire is a good example of the pre-colonial administration in Yoruba land. It had the Alaafin who was the head of the empire, the Ogboni cult’s administration and last but not the least the army. However, the Igbo people are known for their segmentary and acephalous way of life, because they had no centralized states. And functioned without kings and they were grouped into five sub-cultures: the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo of North- Eastern Nigeria, the Western Igbo and the Northern Igbo. One of the most popular origin stories is the one that points to Israel because of the so called similarities between the cultures of the Igbo and that of the ancient Hebrew. In the Igbo traditional society there was no centralized system of government rather it was decentralized and had direct democracy unlike in the case of Yoruba. The family was the smallest political unit headed by eldest male who was an Ofo title holder. They also had the age grade, Oha-na-eze, and the secret societies.

Further, the Hausa land is located in Northern Nigeria. Hausa land, before 1804 comprised of fourteen states and there were of two distinct groups. The first group consists of seven states called “Hausa Bakwai” states, which are Hausa legitimate states. The second group consists of the remaining states known as “Hausa banza” states that are Hausa illegitimates states. Islam was not introduced to the region on any scale until the eleventh century. The Sarki was known as the head of any typical Hausa state and it was between 14th and 15th centuries that the socio-political organization of Hausa took any shape. Islam was introduced to Hausa land in the 14th century and by the 15th century it was accepted as the religion of the ruling class. The jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804 and it further strengthened the religion in that area. There were emirs selected to rule the caliphate in Sokoto and Gwandu. The emir was the absolute monarch in his emirate; he was the political, administrative and spiritual leader. There were members of the council namely, Sarkin Fada, Waziri, Galadima, Madawaki, Magaji, Sarkin Dan Doka, Sarkin Ruwa, Sarkin Pawa, Yari. The Hakimi was known for collecting taxes and he chooses people to assist him. And the judicial administration of Hausa-Fulani was based on Islamic legal system called Sharia.

In addition, the British who are often praised as the first Europeans for arriving in Nigeria aren’t the first to land in Nigerian; rather the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive through Bini Kingdom. The struggle among the European powers for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among them in the 19th century. Each of the European powers was given the opportunity to establish colonies where it had vested interest. The struggle for Africa, by these European powers led to the partitioning of Africa after the Berlin conference of 1884-1885. British colonized Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia, and Sierra Leone in West Africa. As from 1898, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria and to achieve there a number of measure were taken, for instance the removal of visible opposition of colonial rule. Before 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were still under their original administration but by 1900 the whole Nigerian was under British administration. The may amalgamation was the first ever one but the second one was on January 1914 were the Northern and southern were amalgamated. Sir Fredrick Lugard is best known for the amalgamation. Then indirect rule was just the British government using local ruler to rule her colonies.

In conclusion, the history of Nigeria is very important in learning of the issues in today’s government and politics. The pre-colonial and colonial era are also essential in this and let’s not forget the post-colonial era. This chapter explains in details the history of the traditional people and their way of administration.