

# Nigeria

*and the tragedy of Biafra*



# no war in modern Scandinavia

- ◆ Within the North Germanic branch of the Indo-European Language Family, we observe a **dialect continuum** in mainland Scandinavia.
- ◆ Danish, Swedish, Nynorsk, and Norwegian Bokmål can be considered **different codified national standards of a pluricentric Scandinavian language**.
- ◆ Despite linguistic and orthographic differences, Scandinavians have avoided civil warfare and have been internationally coöperative in modern times.





# warring Western South Slavic dialects

- ❖ The Western subgroup of the South Slavic branch of the Indo-European Language Family is another example of a **dialect continuum**. Before the break-up of Yugoslavia, Serbo-Croatian was a **monocentric** national standard.
- ❖ Unlike in Scandinavia, civil warfare has resulted in Serbo-Croatian becoming a **pluricentric language** with **four codified national standards**.
- ❖ Also unlike in Scandinavia, significant religious, orthographic, and other historical differences far overshadowed the minor dialectal differences.



Croatian  
in Zagreb

=



Serbian  
in Belgrad

=



Bosnian  
in Sarajevo

=

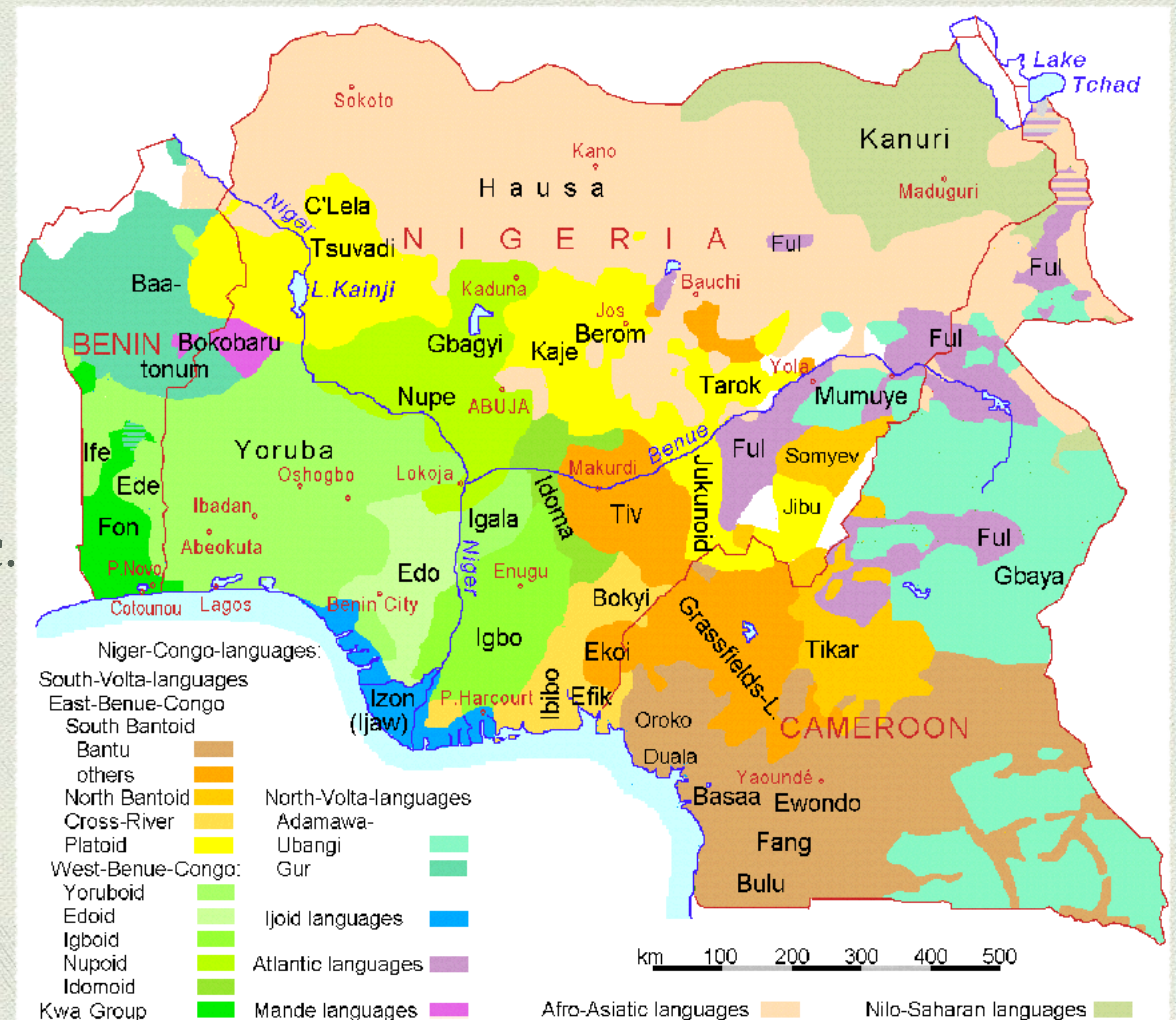


Montenegrin  
in Podgorica



# complex language ecology in Nigeria

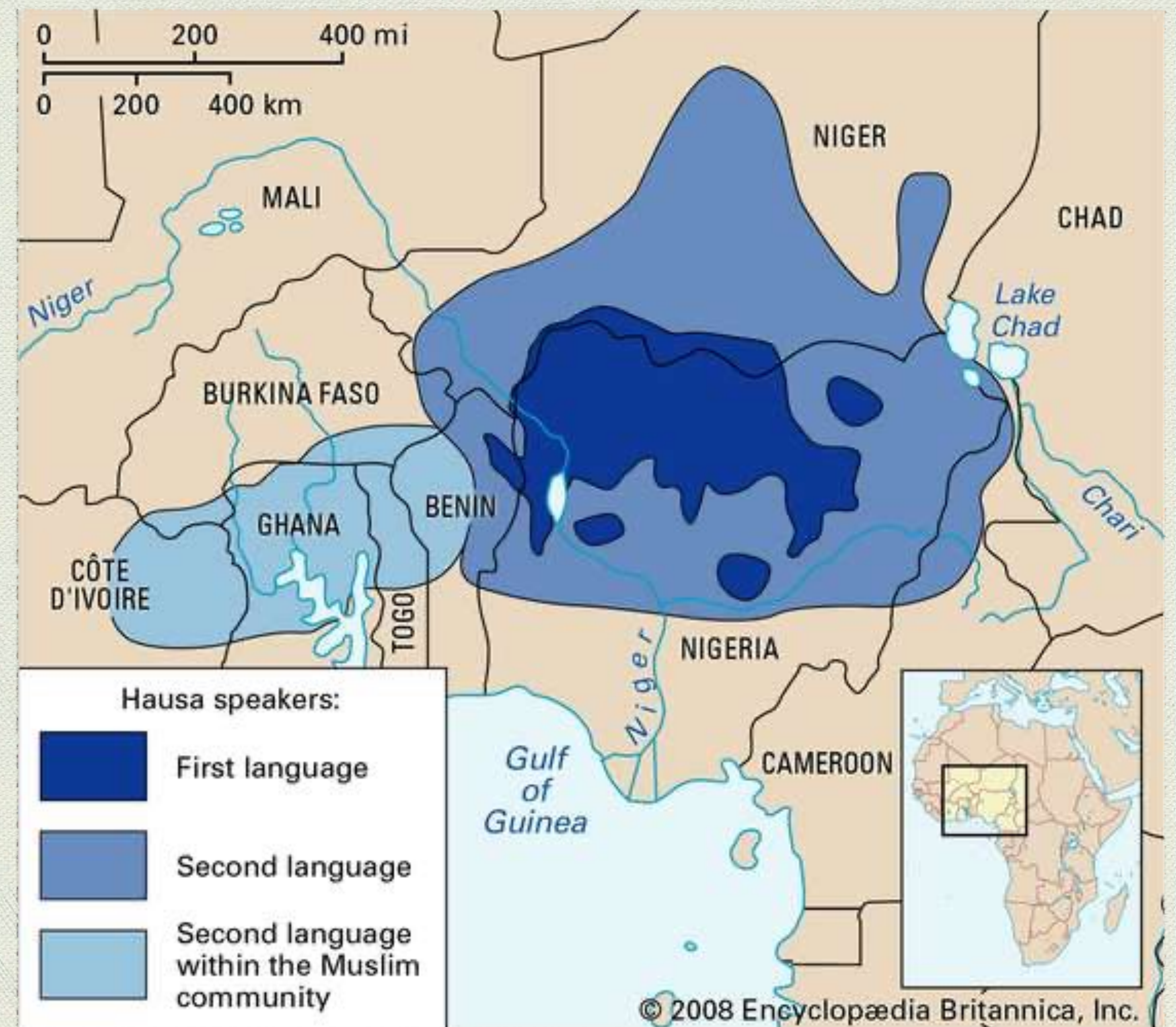
- English is the official language of Nigeria, but 500 other languages are also spoken.
- The indigenous languages of Nigeria come from three different language families: Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Afroasiatic.
- Unlike the situation of Scandinavia, but similar to the former Yugoslavia, language differences are associated with past warfare and continuing ethnic strife.





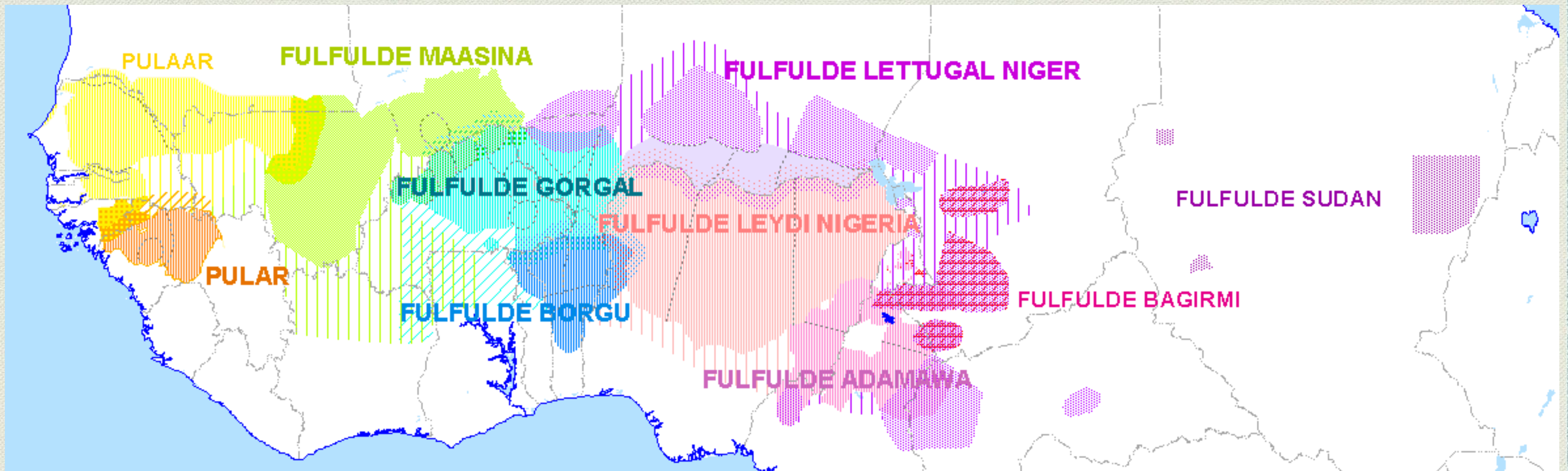
# Hausa language importance

- ◆ In addition to being a native language of northern Nigeria and bordering parts of Niger and Benin, the Afroasiatic language **Hausa** is an important regional second language and a sub-Saharan Muslim lingua franca.





# Fula dialect continuum



- ◆ The Niger-Congo language **Fula** is part of a dialect continuum that stretches across central Africa. In northern Nigeria, Fula has been in contact with Hausa since the late 15th Century. Bilingualism is very common, and there is a lot of Hausa vocabulary in the Fula spoken in Nigeria.



# Nigerian languages with many speakers

- ◆ **Hausa** (Afroasiatic) is a regional lingua franca, and it has been commonly written with two scripts, **boko** (currently preferred) and **ajami**, the latter associated with Islam.
- ◆ **Yoruba** (Niger-Congo, Yoruboid group) is a pluricentric language of West Africa.
- ◆ **Igbo** / Ibo (Niger-Congo, Igboid group)
- ◆ **Fula** / Fulani (Niger-Congo, Senegambian group)
- ◆ **Ibibio** (Niger-Congo, Cross River group)
- ◆ **Kanuri** (Nilo-Saharan)
- ◆ Yoruba, Igbo, Fula, and Ibibio, Nigeria's four most popular Niger-Congo languages, are not mutually intelligible.





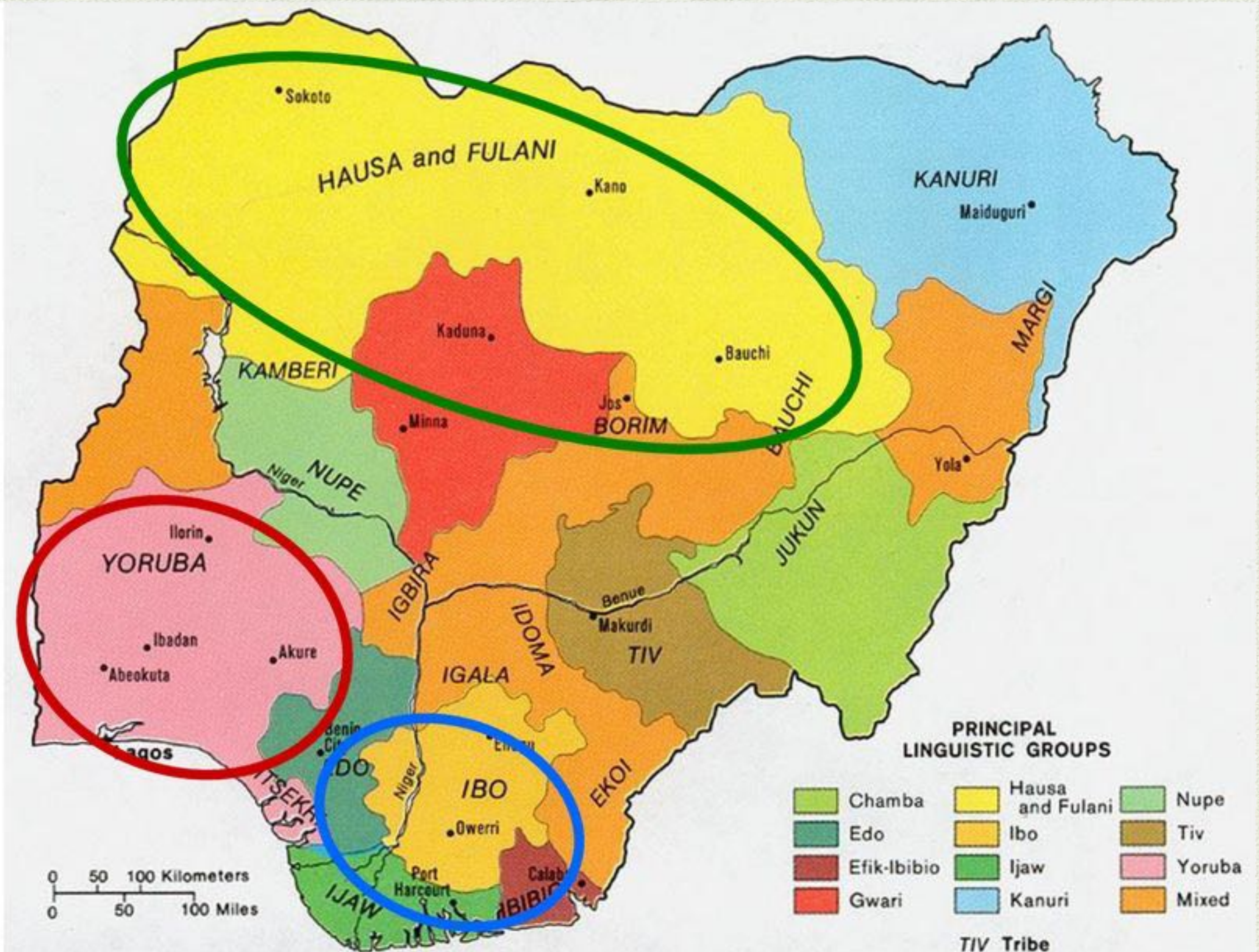
# politically dominant language areas

- ◆ The Hausa-Fulani are a mixed ethnic group that dominates northern Nigeria. Most of them are Muslim. Although Fula is the language of the Fulani, many Fulani speak Hausa.
- ◆ The Yoruba dominate the area around Lagos.
- ◆ The Igbo/Ibo dominate the area of southeastern Nigeria.

**The North  
Hausa-  
Fulani**

**The West  
Yoruba**

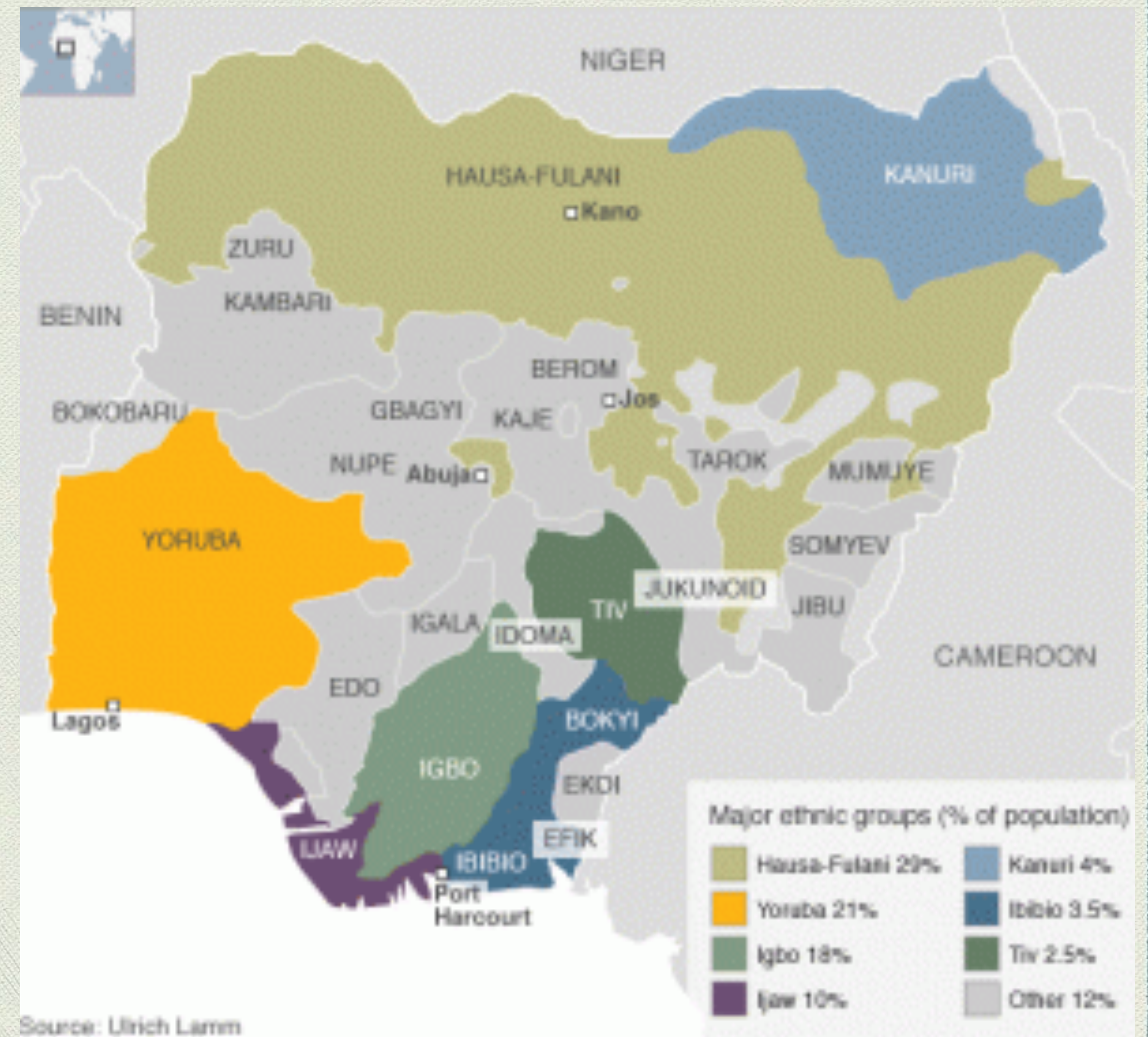
**The East  
Igbo**





# Yoruba and Igbo urban areas

- ❖ The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo groups comprise two thirds of the Nigerian population.
- ❖ The Hausa-Fulani population resides far from the wealthier urban areas of Lagos and Port Harcourt. Many Fulani are semi-nomadic herders who frequently travel across the international border.





# oil discovery

- ❖ In 1956, the first commercial oil well in Nigeria began production, and soon pipelines to Port Harcourt were built. Crude oil exports began in 1958.
- ❖ The resulting economic boom worsened ethnic tensions, which climaxed in 1966 pogroms.





“The pogroms I witnessed in Makurdi, Nigeria (late Sept. 1966) were foreshadowed by months of intensive anti-Ibo and anti-Eastern conversations among Tiv, Idoma, Hausa and other Northerners resident in Makurdi, and, fitting a pattern replicated in city after city, the massacres were led by the Nigerian army. Before, during and after the slaughter, Col. Gowon could be heard over the radio issuing 'guarantees of safety' to all Easterners, all citizens of Nigeria, but the intent of the soldiers, the only power that counts in Nigeria now or then, was painfully clear. After counting the disemboweled bodies along the Makurdi road I was escorted back to the city by soldiers who apologised for the stench and explained politely that they were doing me and the world a great favor by eliminating Igbos.”

– *Charles Keil, an ethnomusicologist who was visiting Nigeria in 1966*



# the Republic of Biafra (1967-1970)



- ◆ In 1967, the majority Igbo area seceded from Nigeria to form the **Republic of Biafra**.
- ◆ Five other African countries recognized Biafran independence, and many other countries supported the new government.





# anti-Igbo retaliation

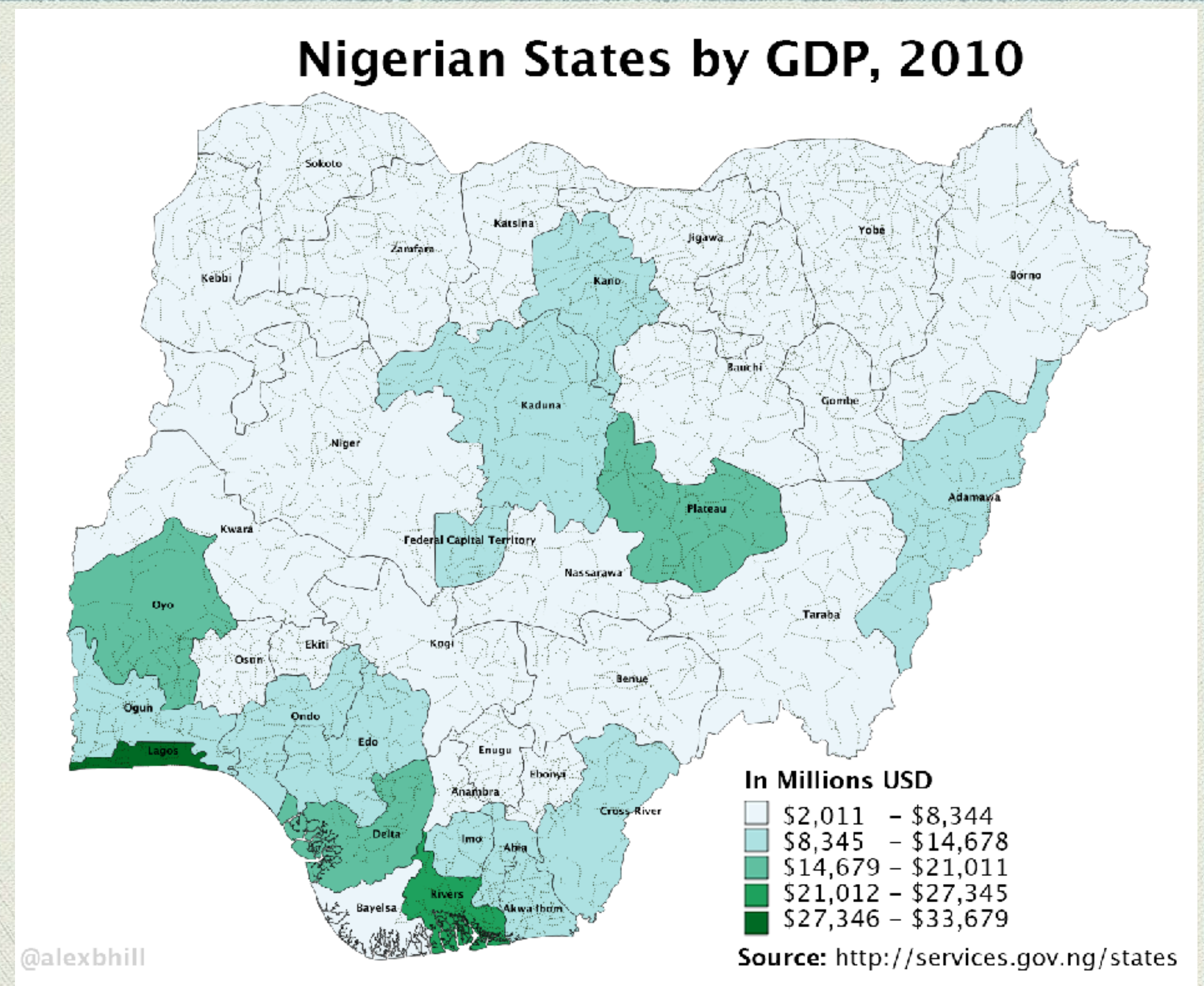
- ◆ The Nigerian civil war lasted until 1970, resulting in severe starvation and other **civilian suffering** in Biafra; two million Biafrans died.
- ◆ Le Comité de Lutte contre le Génocide au Biafra, which was later renamed **Médecins Sans Frontières** (Doctors Without Borders), was organized to ease Biafran suffering.
- ◆ Since the war, Nigerian government **discrimination against Igbo** speakers has continued.
- ◆ Since 1999, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) has advocated for the peaceful creation of an independent Biafra.
- ◆ In 2020, MASSOB joined the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO).





# north-south income disparity

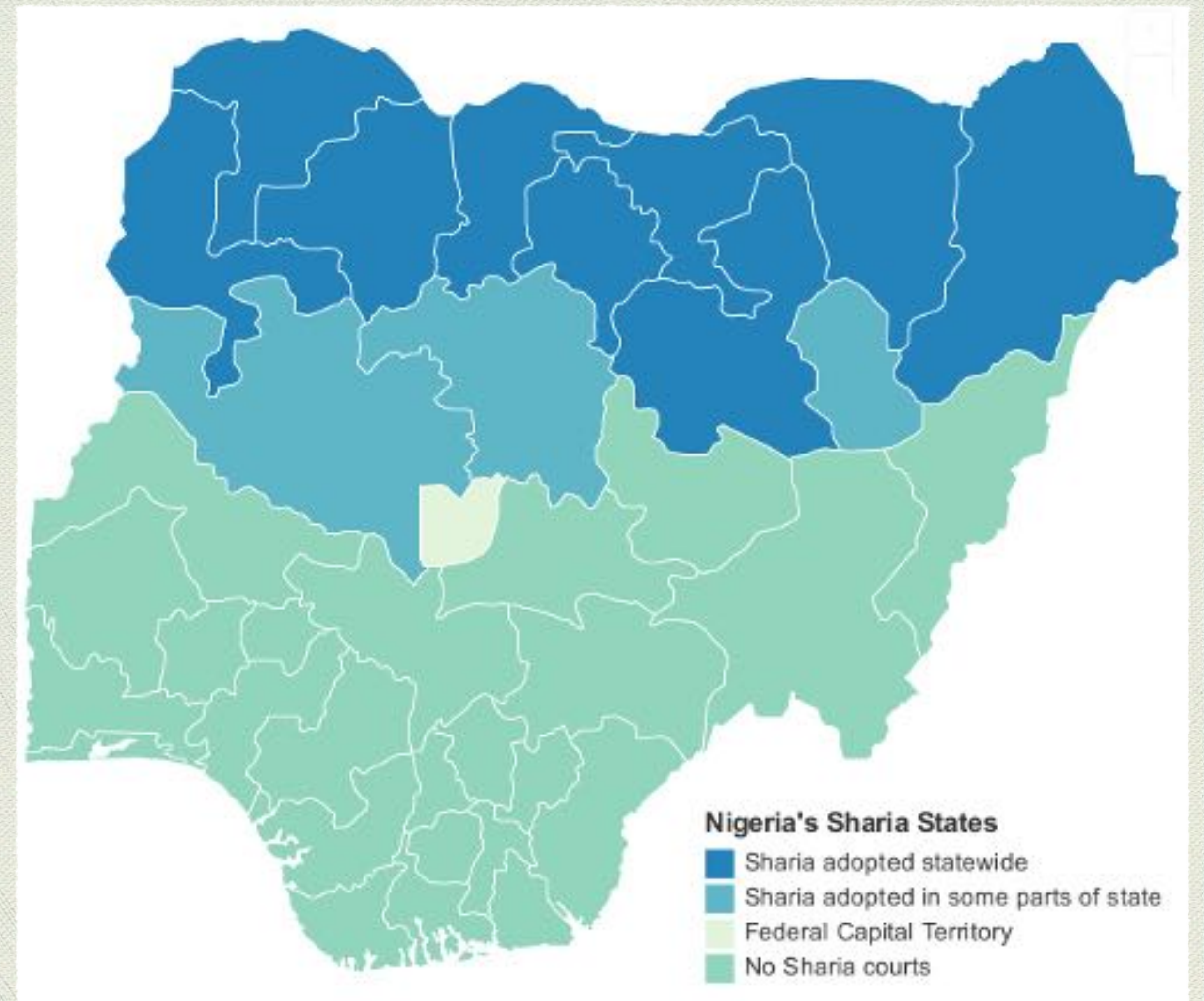
- ◆ Despite the alliance of Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani groups during the civil war, the Yoruba continue to be wealthier than the Hausa-Fulani.
- ◆ One third of the Fulani continue to live as semi-nomadic herders. They are the world's largest nomadic population.





# Islam in the north; Christianity in the south

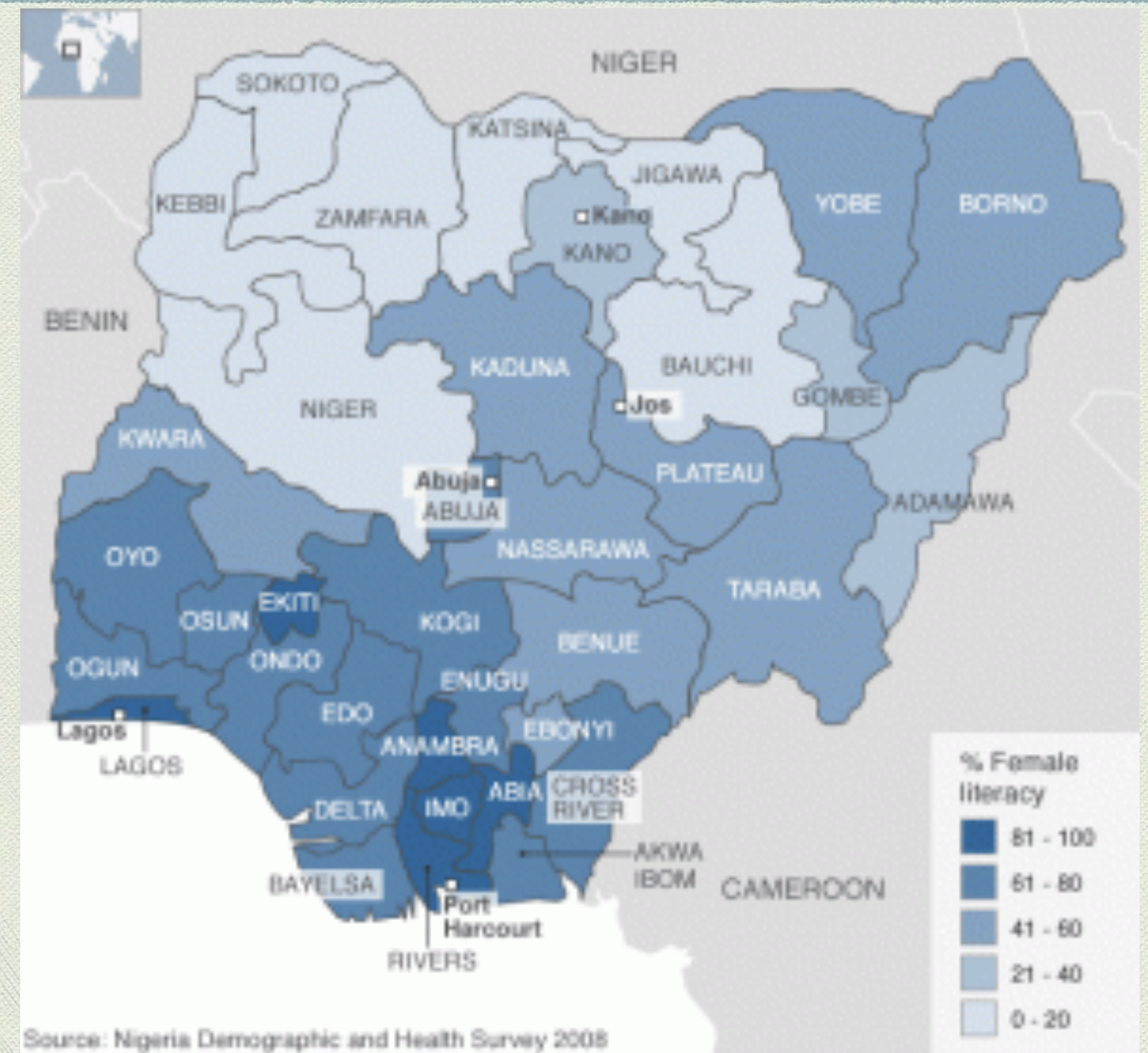
- ◆ Some Nigerian states have adopted **sharia** (i.e., Islamic canonical law) into their legal system. This is an indication of the influence of **Islam** in those areas.
- ◆ None of the southern states have adopted sharia.
- ◆ 98% of the **Fulani** are **Muslim**.
- ◆ **Hausa** language use is strongly associated with **Islam**.





# religion and female illiteracy

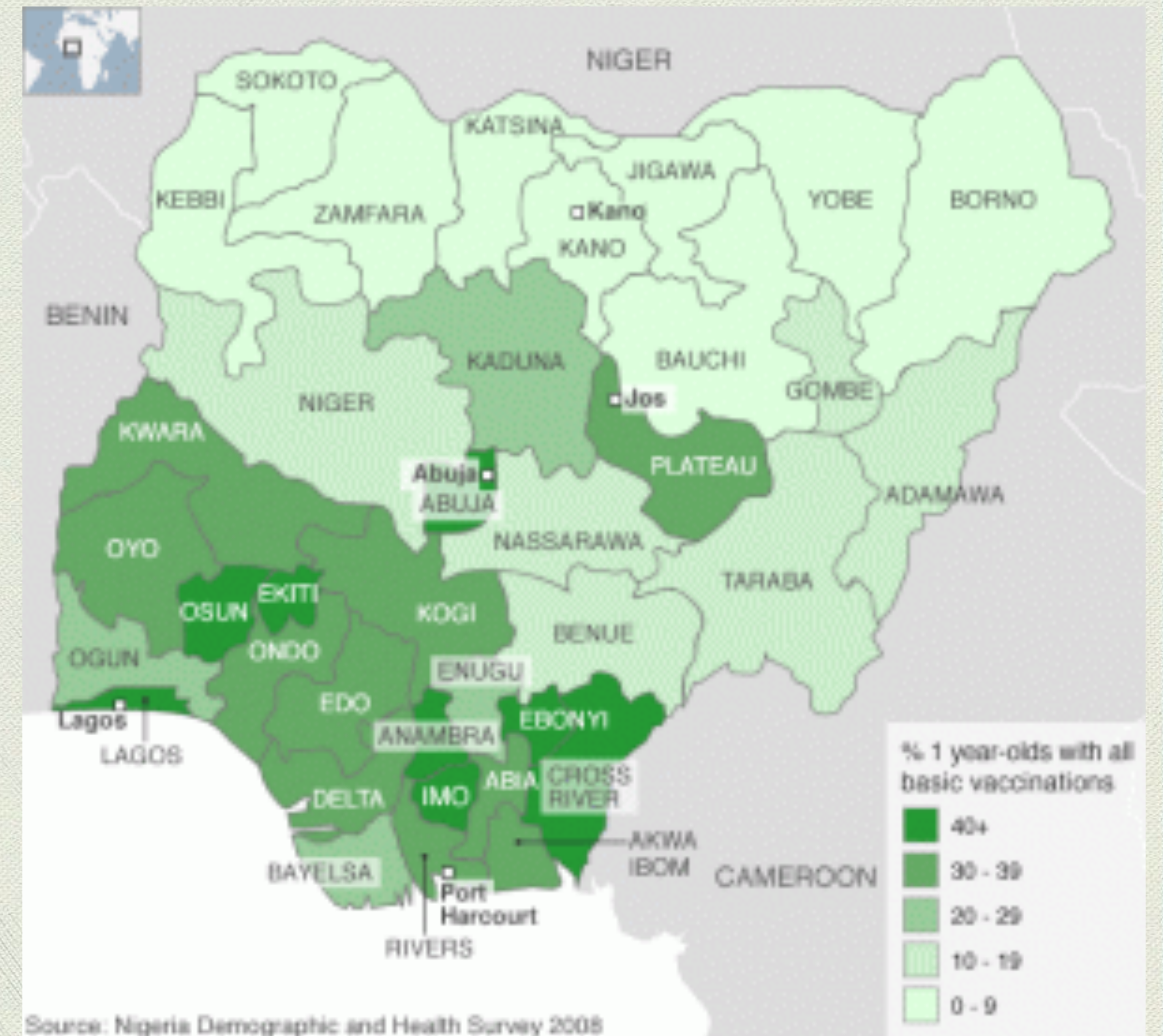
- ◆ Native Hausa-speaking Muslim areas have the lowest female literacy rates.





# religion and medical services

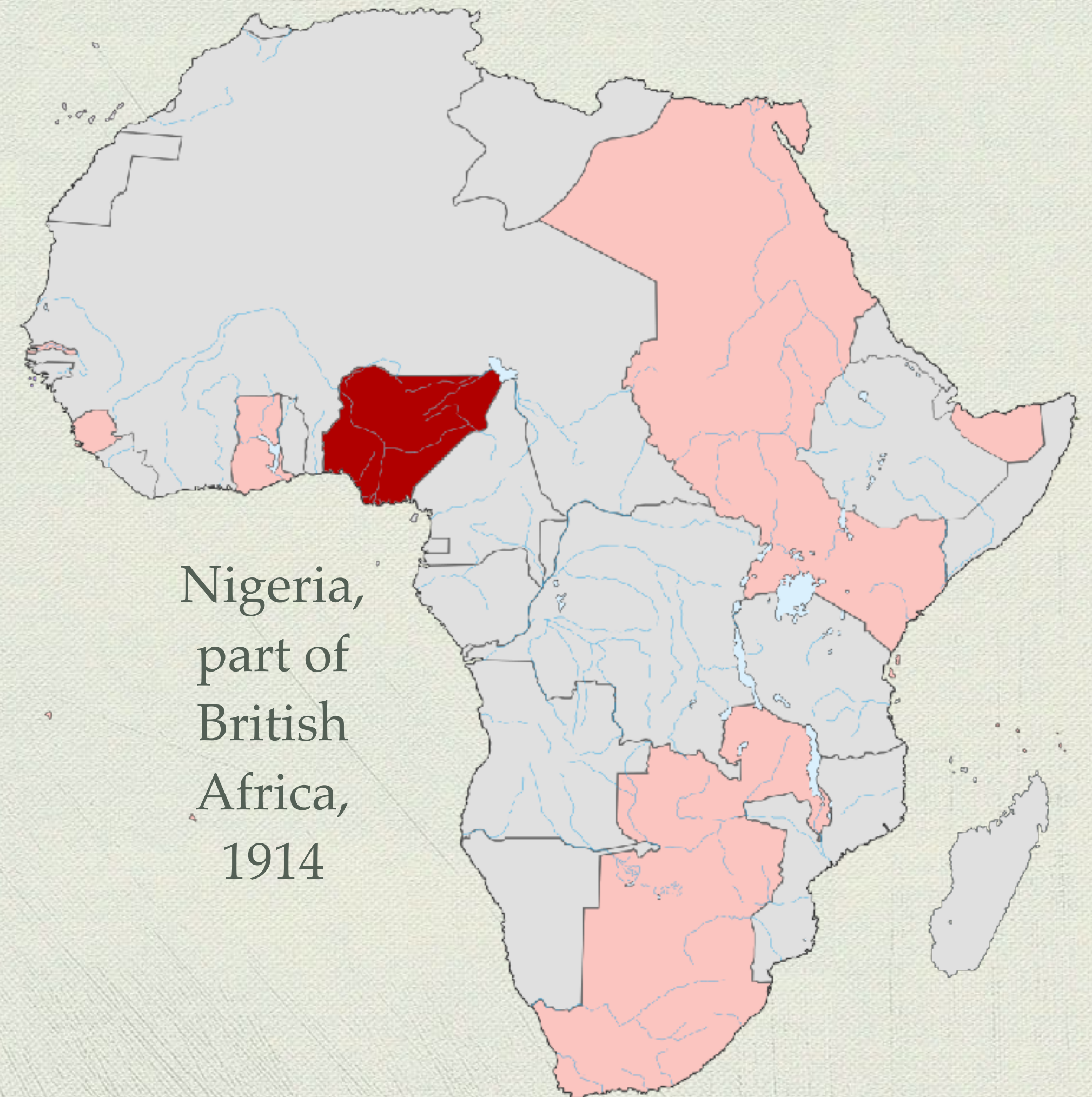
- ❖ One way to measure people's access to general medical care is by the state-by-state rates of vaccination.
- ❖ Vaccination rates are dramatically lower in Muslim areas.





# English colonial legacy

- ◆ English was the **colonial language** of Nigeria.
- ◆ British colonization began with the annexation of Lagos in 1861. The Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria was formed in 1914. In 1954, Nigeria became an autonomous Federation of Nigeria, which then became independent of Britain in 1960.
- ◆ The Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 constitution acknowledges the primacy of English: "The business of the National Assembly **shall be conducted in English**, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefor."



Nigeria,  
part of  
British  
Africa,  
1914



# the current language situation of Nigeria

- ❖ Because English is the country's **lingua academica**, it has also become the **de facto official language** of Nigeria. In 1996, Nigeria declared French to be a second official language taught in schools, but still French is known much less than English.
- ❖ Nigeria's constitution requires that the National Assembly use English, but indigenous languages may be used in the state houses.
- ❖ Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are routinely spoken in the geographic areas dominated by these languages. Also, Nigerian Pidgin (an English-base creole language) is spoken throughout the country, especially in the Niger Delta Region.
- ❖ **English** and **Nigerian Pidgin** have emerged as nonpolitical languages which can be used to mitigate the continuing ethnic and religious tensions of the country.



