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AP® Comparative Government and Politics
Nigeria Briefing Paper

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Federal Republic of Nigeria Briefing Paper

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Preface: Why Study Nigeria?

The case of Nigeria provides useful insights into the challenges that face countries throughout the "developing world." While the sprawling West African country is best known in the popular press for its large oil reserves, the corrupt use of high-level positions to gain personal wealth (often referred to a *prebendalism*), and political instability, Nigeria's experiences are far more complex than these depictions portray. The purpose of this paper is to provide the foundation for understanding Nigeria comparatively, focusing on the following issue areas: maintaining the balance of civil/military relations, managing diversity, transitioning from authoritarian/military rule to democracy, successfully exploiting natural resources for the public good, and determining the role of religion in politics.

The Importance of Comparison

The countries included in the AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam have some unique characteristics that defy simple comparison, but there are also some commonalities across the cases that deserve attention. The goal of the comparative approach is to identify similar political patterns and processes that facilitate generalizations, and, in some instances, develop theories that provide tentative predictions based on these observations. Comparing Nigeria with some of these countries demonstrates the benefits of comparison.

Civil/Military Relations

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria's unstable political history can be characterized by a series of military dictatorships interspersed with brief interludes of limited democracy and civilian rule. The case of Nigeria offers a cautionary tale of the excesses of military rule bolstered by oppression, force, prebendalism, and ethnic/regional favoritism. The case of Nigeria provides insights into the challenges faced by countries with well-entrenched military power to successfully transition to participatory, democratic rule. It also sheds light on the challenges that civil/military relations pose to democratically elected civilian leaders attempting to consolidate democracy while addressing the concerns of military leaders with a history of extraconstitutional (and nondemocratic) approaches to political rule.

Managing Ethnic/Religious Diversity

Nigeria's ethnic and religious communities have challenged the legitimacy of national authority since the early days of colonialism. The British solution to this challenge was to establish federal arrangements that coincided with ethnic/regional groupings, thus undermining the fragile process of nation building. This approach to diversity has continued throughout the independence period, with regional constituencies continually contesting national authority and demanding autonomy in political decision making and access to natural resources. Long-simmering ethnic tensions culminated in the 1967-70 Biafran civil war, which threatened national authority in the Igbo-dominated eastern region of the country. While the east was unsuccessful in its efforts to secede, the wounds of this civil war remain as the integrity and legitimacy of the Nigerian "nation" continues to be tested. Nigeria has attempted to address the fragmentation of national authority by developing a federal system of government that divides power between national, state, and local levels. The goal has been to develop a political system that accommodates diversity

while successfully performing the tasks of national governance. Other countries faced with this type of challenge have responded in a myriad of ways.

Russia's multiethnic state exhibits some similarities with Nigeria, as both have had to contend with identity-based civil wars (the Biafran civil war in Nigeria and the Chechneyan civil war in Russia). Even though Russia is an advanced industrialized country with a well-developed communications and technology infrastructure, similar to Nigeria, it has to contend with subnational ethnic cleavages that have escalated into violent conflict. This elucidates a key leadership challenge regarding the relationship between development and stability. From a former superpower to a struggling "developing country," ethnic/religious cleavage and conflict can undermine national legitimacy and integration.

Even though China is the most populous country in the world, the government has maintained control over its numerous linguistic and regional groups, occasionally using brute force to repress political opposition (as the events in Tibet demonstrate). While Nigeria is far smaller in population and size, it is still a giant on the African continent, with ethnic, religious, and regional differentiation constantly testing national authority and legitimacy. Many observers point to the role that ideology can play in managing (and suppressing?) diversity and building a national culture. The myriad of civilian and military leaders who have ruled in Nigeria have not identified or clearly articulated national ideologies to unify the people of this struggling West African country. As the case of China demonstrates, political ideology can play an important role in limiting identity-based fragmentation, but there are costs involved when this ideology substantially limits political freedoms.

Consolidating Democracy

The legacy of colonialism and military rule, combined with a population divided along ethnic and religious lines, has challenged Nigeria's transition to, and consolidation of, democracy. Prebendal tendencies that have deprived the general public of the benefits of its vast oil reserves have also undermined the legitimacy of political institutions, both authoritarian and democratic. The current democratically elected government has made substantial progress since it assumed power in 1999, but the fledgling democracy reintroduced in 1999 still remains a fragile experiment vulnerable to a return to military rule.

Great Britain's long, evolutionary path to parliamentary democracy sharply contrasts with independent Nigeria's political history. Likewise, Mexico became independent from Spain well over a century ago, giving the country more time to institutionalize its political system and evolve toward a more democratic order. While it is not realistic to imply that Nigeria needs the same amount of time as Mexico and Great Britain to achieve democratic stability, we can distill from these comparisons that building political systems cannot be achieved overnight. Before passing judgement on Nigeria's well-documented "failures," it is essential for students of comparative politics to remember to accommodate the variable of "history" in the analysis.

Benefiting from Natural Resources

Nigeria's oil-rich delta region generates enough revenue to address many of the country's development woes, yet most of the population remains without access to basic government services. While political instability and prebendalism have contributed to this problem, there are other factors that influence the effective national management of natural resources. For example, bureaucracies staffed by well-trained and adequately compensated professionals can play a meaningful role

in managing these resources, and a vibrant civil society with the legal guarantee of free speech can pressure the government to fairly and effectively use oil export revenue to promote national development.

Islam and Democracy

Iran's theocratic order—dominated by Shi'a Islam—is quite different from Islam in Nigeria, which has a substantial, but not overwhelmingly dominant, Muslim community based mostly in the north (and, to a lesser extent, in the western region of the country). The postrevolution government in Iran has implemented Shari'ah law, and there are many Muslims in Nigeria's north who have a similar goal for their region. In both countries, support for Shari'ah is not unanimous, but this issue certainly has had political implications. A comparison of both countries demonstrates that the impact of Islam (and religion, more generally) on political life can vary substantially across cases, depending on factors such as (but not limited to) demography and history.

General Map of Nigeria Highlighting Major Cities

Source: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia03/nigeria_sm03.gif

Administrative Map of Nigeria Highlighting State Boundaries

Source: http://tinyurl.com/6gqyl

For additional maps of Nigeria, consult:

- www.m-w.com/maps/images/maps/nigeria_map.gif
- www.geographic.org/maps/nigeria_maps.html

Country Overview

Topography

Southern lowlands comprised of mangrove swamps, deltas, and lagoons merge into central hills and plateaus. There are mountains in the southeast of the country, and flat plains in the north merge into the Sahara Desert.

Bordering Countries

Nigeria shares borders with Benin to the west (773 km), Cameroon (1,690 km) and Chad (87 km) to the east, Niger (1,496 km) to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean (853 km) to the south.

Natural Resources

Nigeria has a land area of 923,768 square kilometers, with approximately 30 percent arable land and 12 percent covered by forests and woodlands. Along with a wide array of mineral resources, including limestone, coal, tin, columbite, asbestos, iron ore, gold, silver, lead, and zinc, the country also has natural gas, and it is one of the world's major producers of petroleum.

Climate

There are two distinct seasons in the country: the dry season and the rainy season. When moving inland from the coast regions, the duration and intensity of

precipitation decreases. For example, in the southeast region, annual rainfall can reach 400 centimeters, while some parts of the dry, northern area of the country often receive less than 75 centimeters. Overall, the climate is equatorial in the south, tropical in the center, and arid in the north of the country.

Population

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with a total of 133,881,703 people (2003 estimate). The country has an annual growth rate of 2.53 percent. A majority of the population is 15–64 years old (53.6 percent), with 43.6 percent 0–14 years old and 2.8 percent of the population 65 and older.

Ethnicity

There are more than 250 distinct ethnic groups in the country, with the following groups the most populous and politically influential: the Hausa-Fulani in the north (29 percent), the Yoruba in the west (21 percent), and the Igbo (also spelled Ibo) in the east (18 percent).

Religion

The northern region of the country, where the Hausa-Fulani reside, is predominantly Muslim. The Yoruba in the southwest are comprised of both Muslims and Christians, and the Igbo in the southeast are predominantly Christian. Overall, 50 percent of the country is Muslim, 40 percent is Christian, and 10 percent follow "indigenous" or "traditional" religions.

Linguistic Breakdown

The official language is English, but most people speak the language of their respective ethnic group.

Timeline of Key Events

Precolonial Nigeria: 12,000 BC to AD 1861

12,000 BC	Archeological evidence of human settlement dating back to the Stone Age located in the forest and savanna regions.
500 BC	Archeological evidence of iron civilization found in Nok.
AD 1000–1500	Kingdoms of Benin, Oyo, Hausa states, and Kanem Borno flourish.
1450–1850	Increasing contact with Europe and the New World; advent of the slave trade.
1485	Establishment of the first Portuguese trading post.
1530	Christianity introduced in Benin but not widely accepted by the local population.
1804	Islamic revolution in northern Nigeria led by Usuman dan Fodio leads to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate and the spread of Islam.
1833	Slave trade abolished.
1842	Conversion to Christianity in southern Nigeria; Christianity and Islam emerge as the dominant religions.

The Colonial Period: 1861–1960

1861	The British establish a consulate in Lagos, formally initiating the colonization of Nigeria.
1886	Formation of the Royal Niger Company with a charter to trade and enter into treaties in the Niger basin region.

1893	Establishment of a British protectorate over the Yoruba in the eastern region.
1900	Establishment of a British protectorate over the northern and southern regions.
1936	Establishment of the Nigerian Youth Movement.
1946-47	Enactment of the (Richards) constitution, which establishes a central legislature and three Regional Houses of Assembly.
1951	Enactment of the second (Macpherson) constitution.
1954	Enactment of a third (Lyttleton) constitution, establishing a federal system of government.
1957	Regional self-government granted to the eastern and western regions of Nigeria; devolution of political power from the British to Nigerians.
1959	Regional self-government granted to the northern region of Nigeria.

The Independence Period: 1960 to Present

1960	Independence from Great Britain on October 1—"First Republic" is established as a parliamentary system of government with Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Muslim Hausa-Fulani) as prime minister.
1963	Republican form of government established.
1966	Balewa is assassinated in a military coup, ending the "First Republic." Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi (Christian Igbo) replaces Balewa.
1966	Ironsi is assassinated in a military coup. Yakubu Gowon (Christian from the "middle belt" of the country) replaces Ironsi.
1967	Three-year Biafran civil war begins on July 3.
1975	Gowon is overthrown in a military coup. Murtala Muhammed (Muslim Hausa-Fulani) replaces Gowon.
1976	Muhammed is assassinated in an abortive military coup. Olusegun Obasanjo (Christian Yoruba) replaces Muhammed.

1979	Shehu Shagari (Muslim Hausa-Fulani) is democratically elected president, replacing Obasanjo and establishing the "Second Republic."
1983	Shagari is overthrown in a military coup. Muhammed Buhari (Muslim Hausa Fulani) replaces Shagari, ending the "Second Republic."
1985	Buhari is overthrown in a military coup. Ibrahim Babangida (Muslim from the "middle belt" of the country) replaces Buhari.
1993	Babangida is pressured to resign and accede to a caretaker government after annulled elections in 1993 (the aborted transition period has been categorized as the "Third Republic"). Ernest Shonekan (Christian Yoruba) is appointed as government caretaker.
1993	Sani Abacha (Muslim from the north of the country) replaces Shonekan in a military coup.
1998	Abacha dies suddenly. General Abdulsalami Abubakar assumes power, and he presides over a successful transition to democratic rule one year later.
1999	Start of the "Fourth Republic." Former military leader Olusegun Obasanjo is democratically elected as president; he is reelected in 2003 to a second term.

Historical Overview

Precolonial Nigeria

From the Iron Age technological advances discovered by the Nok to the great kingdoms Oyo, Songhai, the Hausa states, and Kanem Borno, Nigeria has a proud tradition that flourished long before the arrival of European explorers in the port city of Lagos.

Between 900 BC and AD 200, the central region of Nigeria was dominated by the Nok, who discovered how to smelt iron and proceeded to establish this region as one of the richest and most advanced in Africa (and, for that matter, the world). When Muslim traders arrived in the region in AD 700, a series of culturally rich and

militarily powerful empires emerged. Kanem Borno was a major trading center connected by trade routes that extended across the Sahara Desert to the Middle East and Europe. By the sixteenth century, the Oyo Kingdom based in the southern town of Ife was a vibrant and proud expression of Benin culture.

During the waning years of Benin dominance, a number of European colonial powers vied for control of the West African coast, with the Portuguese establishing trading stations at the end of the fifteenth century, and the French, British, and Dutch doing the same two centuries later. It was not until Napoleon was defeated in 1815 did the British emerge as the dominant power in the region. All of the European powers that contested for control during this period actively promoted, and benefited from, the lucrative slave trade, which forcibly relocated millions to the Caribbean, North America, and South America to work on plantations.

The Colonial Period

In 1861, Great Britain annexed Lagos and subsequently moved inland to conquer all of modern-day Nigeria under the leadership of Sir Frederick Lugard. Until 1900, this expansion occurred under the auspices of the United Africa Company (later named Royal Niger Company), which wanted to control the lucrative Niger River trade route. When the British government formally assumed control in 1900, Nigeria was divided into two separate protectorates, one in the north and the other in the south. This was the first step in a long process of repeatedly dividing Nigeria according to ethnic divisions, thus laying the foundation for the contemporary federal arrangement in the country. The colony and protectorate of Nigeria was formally established in 1914, comprised initially of the northern and southern regions. The northern region was administratively organized by a system of "indirect rule," in which British colonial administrators worked through Muslim emirates. A "direct rule" administrative apparatus was established in the south of the country. In 1939, the colony was split into the peanut-producing north, cocoa-producing west, and

palm-oil-producing east. These provincial divisions roughly corresponded to the major ethnic groups in the country: Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west, and Igbo in the east. By the end of the Second World War, these provinces were granted limited self-government by regional legislatures. There was also a federal parliament elected by the regional legislatures. From 1945 until independence, a series of three constitutions were introduced to Nigeria, gradually granting greater degrees of local autonomy and self-rule. The colony was granted full independence with a new constitution on October 1, 1960 (its fourth in less than 15 years).

The Independence Period

Throughout the independence period, Nigeria has alternated between civilian and military rule: there were three democratically elected governments and a series of eight military leaders that ruled for a total of 28 years. It remains to be seen if the Fourth Republic can withstand the pressures of ethnic polarization and the seemingly insatiable desire of military leaders to assume control and "restore order" during times of political crisis. A brief review of the four republics, and the reasons for the collapse of the first three, provides some insights into whether the current Obasanjo government can build the foundation for democracy to finally flourish in a country with incredible potential to be a leader on the African continent.

The First Republic that assumed power in 1960 was patterned after the British parliamentary system, with some characteristics of the American presidential system as well. Similar to the British system, there was a House of Representatives (called the House of Commons in Great Britain), which was popularly elected in single-member districts that generally corresponded to ethnic divisions. Consistent with the Westminster model, the Nigerian House of Representatives elected the prime minister and cabinet from its own members. There was also a Senate that was patterned after the British House of Lords, with tribal chiefs and traditional leaders playing a ceremonial role in the political process. There were also three

significant similarities with the American presidential system: (1) the federal structure developed during colonialism was retained, (2) a written constitution was promulgated which delineated the powers of government and rights of citizens, and (3) a Supreme Court was created to assure that the acts of the federal government were constitutional.

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was elected the country's first prime minister, serving as the head of the government. As a member of the British Commonwealth, the head of state for Nigeria was the British monarch. This arrangement lasted for only three years, when the constitution was amended to become a republic, with a Nigerian president replacing the British monarch as the head of state. Nigeria's first president was Nnamdi Azikiwe. Despite this change, Nigeria opted to remain a part of the British Commonwealth system.

In elections in December 1964/January 1965, Balewa's northern-based party won a parliamentary majority, enabling him to form a new government. These elections were tainted by accusations of electoral fraud, political violence, and a boycott by some opposition groups. Throughout this period, ethnic identity quickly emerged as a primary organizing principle for political party development: the Northern People's Congress was dominated by Hausa-Fulani from the north, the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens represented Igbos, and the Action Group was predominantly Yoruba. This was the start of a trend that has continued until the present. Indeed, the lack of cross-cutting cleavages has made it difficult for truly national political movements to emerge and challenge the ethnic/religious/regional tendencies that were first formally institutionalized during colonial rule.

Nigeria's initial experiment with parliamentary democracy was short-lived, with a coup d'etat in 1966 in which Balewa along with other prominent government leaders were assassinated. Major General Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi invoked emergency powers, suspending the constitution, dismantling the federal system, and banning

all political parties as he formed the Federal Military Government (FMG). The Christian Igbo leader's military rule precipitated anti-Igbo riots and violence outside of the Igbo-dominated east. Less than a year later, Ironsi and some Igbo military officers were killed in another military coup d'etat. A Christian from the north, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, was named head of the FMG, and he quickly reintroduced the federal system of government to the country and promised a constitutional conference to provide the roadmap for a return to civilian rule.

Ethnic polarization continued during Gowon's leadership, with a disruptive civil war from 1967 to 70 that threatened to disintegrate Nigeria. Igbos in the eastern region of the country were particularly unhappy with Gowon's leadership, especially regarding the distribution of oil revenues earned from the eastern region of the country. The governor of this region, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, led this struggle on behalf of the Igbo community, culminating on May 30, 1967, with the establishment of the independent Republic of Biafra. The three-year civil war that ensued resulted in thousands of combat casualties and, some have estimated, over a million deaths in the eastern region due to famine and starvation resulting from the federal government's blockade of the east. In the years following the war, Gowon attempted to reunify Nigeria, but during his rule corruption became rampant, especially during the "oil boom" years of the early 1970s. The combination of corruption, high inflation, and poor economic planning limited his effectiveness and popularity during this period.

Gowon remained in power until 1975, when he was replaced by Murtala Muhammed, a Muslim Hausa-Fulani from the north. Despite Muhammed's efforts to combat corruption by dismissing large numbers of government officials and military officers, the following year Muhammed was assassinated in an abortive military coup d'etat staged by Gowon supporters. He was subsequently replaced by Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Yoruba from the west (and the current elected president of Nigeria!). Obasanjo proceeded to lay the groundwork for the Second

Republic. A 19-state federal republic with a new constitution patterned after the American system was developed, and political activity was permitted after years of a "state of emergency" that severely restricted political liberties. The adoption of an American presidential system was designed to limit the impact of ethnicity on politics: Obasanjo believed that the Westminster parliamentary system facilitated the proliferation of ethnic-based political parties. He hoped that the American model would reverse this trend through the separation of powers and constitutional provisions for checks and balances. Obasanjo increased the number of states to 19, believing that it would be more difficult for the three main ethnic groups to manipulate the federal system in their favor at the expense of the many other smaller ethnic groups in the country. He believed that with more states, more ethnic groups would have political bases independent of the main groups, therefore more evenly distributing political power across all of the groups and regions. The new constitution also required that the successful presidential candidate obtain a majority of the popular vote, with at least 25 percent of the vote in 12 of the 19 states.

Democratic elections were held in 1979, when Shehu Shagari, a Muslim Hausa-Fulani from the north, was elected president. The three parties representing Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo interests received the most votes, demonstrating the continued salience of ethnic politics in the country despite Obasanjo's efforts to achieve the opposite. Shagari was reelected in 1983, amidst political violence and accusations of vote fraud. The courts subsequently reversed several controversial electoral contests, confirming for many that these accusations by the opposition were true. Shagari also had to contend with a global economic recession that resulted in a large drop in the price of oil. Given Nigeria's increasing dependency on oil revenue, this limited government revenues and required the government to implement a series of unpopular austerity measures. Eroded political legitimacy and economic crisis proved too much for the Second Republic to withstand. Similar to the first attempt to establish a democratic order during 1960-66, the Second

Republic served as a brief interlude between a succession of military leaders with limited interest in promoting political participation and democracy in the country.

In a 1983 coup d'etat, another northern Muslim Hausa-Fulani assumed power, Major-General Muhammed Buhari, the former federal commissioner for petroleum. Buhari replaced the federal government with a Supreme Military Council and followed the rituals established by previous military leaders: he dismantled the Second Republic by banning political party activity, dissolving the legislature and asserting military control over the government. The economic malaise precipitated by declining oil revenues eroded support for the military leader, and after two years Major-General Ibrahim Babangida (also Muslim, but this time from the "middle belt" of the country) continued the cycle of military coups d'etat.

Babangida remained in power until 1993—this time under the banner of the ethnically balanced Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). During his administration, he developed a plan for the return to civilian rule carefully controlled by the AFRC. Two political parties were chosen to contest in elections planned for 1993 (the National Republic Convention and the Social Democratic Party), and a new constitution was promulgated in 1992. He also increased the number of states from 19 to 30, mirroring Obasanjo's hope that more states would result in less political clout for the main ethnic groups. Elections for a National Assembly and Senate were held in 1992, and presidential elections in 1993. The presumed victor of the presidential election, Chief Mashood Kastumawo Olawale Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim businessman, was never able to assume office since Babangida annulled the elections, citing electoral fraud as the reason. Many Nigerians took to the streets in cities across the country, and business leaders in Abiola's home area in the west protested, further debilitating an already fragile economy. Babangida promised another round of elections but was forced to resign before they could occur. This aborted transition process is commonly referred to as the Third Republic.

The leader of a caretaker government, Ernest Shonekan (Christian from the Yoruba group), lasted for less than a year, since many saw him as a surrogate of the discredited Babangida regime. He resigned after only four months, transferring power to General Sani Abacha, who assumed control and removed all remnants of Babangida's stillborn plan to reschedule democratic elections. In 1994, Abiola unilaterally declared himself president of a parallel government and promised new elections in 1996. He was quickly placed in detention, and he died in prison in 1998, still awaiting trial. Abacha's years of military rule were no different from many of his predecessors, asserting military control by severely curtailing opposition political activities. He also attempted to reform the political system and tried to reverse the worsening economic conditions in the country. Abacha received widespread international condemnation for executing nine prominent human rights activists in the country in 1995. Among the nine who were killed was Nobel Prize candidate Ken Saro-Wiwa, known internationally for fighting on behalf of the Ogoni people, who lived amidst the country's vast oil reserves but who benefited very little from this lucrative reservoir of "black gold."

Abacha withstood local and international condemnations until he died suddenly in office in 1998. He was replaced by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who quickly and successfully presided over democratic elections in 1999 that witnessed the return of Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo has been in power since then, winning reelection in contested elections in 2003 that paved the way for a second term. The Fourth Republic has had to deal with many of the challenges faced by previous democratically elected governments: religious and ethnic violence, endemic corruption, and provision of basic social services to many Nigerians yet to see the benefits of independence achieved over four decades earlier.

Political Institutions

Branches of Government

Since independence, the executive branch of government has been the most powerful political force in the country. Whether led by a military dictator or democratically elected leader, this branch has consistently guided and controlled political life throughout Nigeria. Both the legislative and judicial branches of government have often served at the will of the leader, with more power and authority during the four republics. While the judicial branch has functioned (to varying degrees) since independence, during periods of military rule legislatures were either disbanded or rendered ineffectual in favor of military bodies that assumed virtually all of the functions of government. The First Republic's parliamentary system was short-lived, giving way to the establishment of a Second Republic modeled after the American presidential system. The presidential model was revived during the current Fourth Republic, but it remains to be seen if this Western import will survive the next political crisis, given the military's propensity to intervene in the political affairs of the country. The current constitution of the Fourth Republic provides for a federal arrangement with authority exercised at the federal, state, and local levels.

At the federal level, there are executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.

The Executive Branch: The president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the popularly elected head of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Presidential terms are four years, with a maximum of two terms of service permitted by the constitution. The president's primary tasks include performing the ceremonial duties of leadership, overseeing the day-to-day administration of government, and coordinating and overseeing the country's

armed forces. The president also appoints government ministers (after confirmation by the Senate), but he must assure that they come from all of the 36 states. To assure for proper coordination between federal and state governments, the president and his ministers comprise a Federal Executive Committee, which assures that enacted laws are properly implemented throughout the country. The president and ministers are not allowed to serve in the National Assembly simultaneously. The vice president assists the president in the tasks enumerated above; he is nominated by the presidential candidate as his running mate for election to the office of the president.

The Legislature: The National Assembly is a bicameral lawmaking body that has a Senate and House of Representatives. The Senate is comprised of 109 members; three representatives from each of the 36 states and one from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. There are 360 members of the House of Representatives. Members from both legislative bodies serve four-year terms and are popularly elected. The main function of the National Assembly is to pass laws for assent by the president. Either house can originate legislation, but it does not become law until formally passed by both houses and assented to by the president.

The Judiciary: The judiciary is responsible for the interpretation of laws in accordance with the constitution, which provides for federal and state courts and election tribunals. At the apex of the federal judiciary is the Supreme Court, which is the highest court of the land. There is also a Court of Appeal and a Federal High Court. For the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja, there is a High Court, Shari'ah Court of Appeal, and Customary Court of Appeal. State courts are comprised of a High Court, Shari'ah Court of Appeal, and Customary Court of Appeal.

Each of the 36 states is administered by a popularly elected governor who serves a four-year term. In addition, each state has a unicameral State House of Assembly, comprised of popularly elected representatives from local government areas. The

number of House of Assembly members in each state is comprised of three times the number of seats that it has in the House of Representatives.

There are a total of 774 local government areas across Nigeria, comprised of a chairman and elected councilors. Local government councils tend to local administrative matters, including (but not limited to) the construction and maintenance of public roads.

The Military

One cannot study Nigerian politics since independence without recognizing the importance of the military in all aspects of political life. Even during civilian administrations, the intimidating shadow of the military looms large. Unlike ethnic-based political parties that often operate explicitly on behalf of sectarian interests in the legislative process, the military is often seen as a disciplined organization with the capacity to make decisions efficiently and effectively. In addition, it is one of the few institutions in the country that is national in character, since it is comprised of people from all regions, ethnic groups, and religious predilections. While not democratically inclined, the armed forces are also often characterized as more representative than political parties and other institutions of government that are subject to ethnic-based patronage. Indeed, military leaders have repeatedly conveyed these rationales to the general public when assuming political power.

However, this does not mean that the military has not been impacted by ethnic, religious, or regional considerations. While all groups are represented, cleavages do exist that have often influenced military officers in and out of power. A brief review of the ethnic/religious/regional identities of military leaders delineated in the timeline and historical overview sections demonstrates that these considerations have been politically salient.

Parties

The first political parties in Nigeria were, for the most part, ethnically based. Little attempt was made to reach out beyond the ethnic power base of these political parties—thus ethnicizing and regionalizing the national political process, turning politics into a zero-sum game of winners and losers. Babangida's forced two-party system and the proliferation of subethnic states since independence were unsuccessful attempts to address this reality.

There are currently two major parties in Nigeria: the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). A third party, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), did not have its own candidate for the presidential elections in 2003, but it did receive over 9 percent of the total votes cast for its House of Representatives and Senatorial candidates.

Elections

The elections that preceded each of the four republics were often contested by the losers and embraced by the victors, who quickly sought to legitimize their claim to political leadership. The annulment of the 1993 presidential elections was the clearest example of this process, with the assumed victor Mashood Abiola eventually detained for contesting this annulment. The many military officers who assumed political leadership in Nigeria have consistently bypassed the electoral process, instead relying on the barrel of the gun for political promotion.

During the 1999 and 2003 presidential elections, PDP presidential candidate Olesugen Obasanjo received over 60 percent of the popular vote. ANPP's Muhamad Buhari received 32 percent of the votes cast in the 2003 elections. Five other parties had candidates for the presidency in 2003, but only one received over 3 percent of the votes cast, with the remaining three garnering less than 1 percent. While

opposition leaders have contested the legitimacy of both contests due to political violence and alleged fraud at the polls, Obasanjo has ruled since 1999, and he is expected to complete his second and final term in office in 2007.

ANPP is currently the main opposition party in the country, with 95 of 360 seats in the House of Representatives and 28 of 109 seats in the Senate. In 2003, the ruling PDP's main base of support was in predominantly Christian southern states. In the 1999 elections, the ruling party received some support in Muslim areas in the north, but this support was less significant during the 2003 presidential contest. In order to assure that there is some national character to presidential elections, the constitution requires candidates to have at least 25 percent of the votes from two-thirds of the states to win the first round of elections.

Constitution(s)

During the post–World War II colonial period, a series of constitutions gradually proffered self-rule and regional autonomy for the Nigerian people. New constitutions also served to guide the content and form of independent Nigeria's three republics, but they were eventually suspended and rendered obsolete during the subsequent periods of military rule. In tandem with promised transitions back to civilian rule, these military leaders often established the mechanisms for rewriting constitutions.

The Bureaucracy

As is the case for many "developing countries," the bureaucracy in Nigeria has been the source of employment for large numbers of people not engaged in trade or agriculture. After independence, Nigerians replaced the British and Indians who dominated the bureaucracy. These Nigerians were mostly from the south, thus exacerbating north/south tensions. With the rapid influx of oil revenues into the state coffers and the proliferation of states, the size of the bureaucracy grew at a

rapid pace. Access to the economic largess of oil revenue, combined with political instability and the lack of accountability, created an opportunity for many to succumb to the temptation of corruption. This is a trend that has proven very difficult to reverse, despite a myriad of attempts by military and civilian governments.

The Media

Freedom of the press has improved substantially during the Fourth Republic, with a proliferation of newspapers, radio, and television stations. Radio continues to be the main source of information for most Nigerians, with newspapers and television most widely used in towns and cities across the country. All 36 states run their own radio stations, and there are over 100 private and state-owned local and national newspapers.

Citizens and Society

Cleavages

The importance of ethnicity, religion, and region in the political life of Nigerians should not be underestimated. Most contentious political issues influence and/or are influenced by these three identities. Islam is most often associated with the Hausa-Fulani in the north, although there are sizable numbers of Muslims associated with other ethnic groups, including in Yoruba in the west. Most of the Christians in the country reside in the middle belt and southern regions. The Biafran civil war had explicit ethnic overtones, when the eastern Igbo attempted to secede from the country, and there has been a spate of violent outbreaks in the north of the country, where some Muslim states have attempted to impose Shari'ah despite opposition from segments of the population.

For the most part, the cleavages that have emerged are not cross-cutting. This has complicated the work of civilian and military leaders who have, with varying degrees of intention and success, attempted to nurture a national political culture that transcends divisive, sectarian politics.

Civil Society

Nigerians have organized themselves in a variety of ways, depending upon religious affiliation, ethnic identification, occupational category, and gender. All have had varying degrees of impact on Nigerian politics, depending upon their organizational capacity, membership numbers, and the relevant issue area.

Many of the ethnic associations that formed during colonialism evolved into political parties, and in contemporary Nigeria, ethnic associations often collaborate with particular political parties. This is also the case with religious organizations. For example, there is an array of Muslim civil society organizations in the north that work with political parties that support the Shari'ah court system and that promote pro-Arab and pro-Muslim policies. Babangida's 1985 decision to change Nigeria's status in the Organization of the Islamic Conference from observer to member was widely supported by many Muslim organizations, but it inflamed Christian organizations in the south, such as the Christian Association of Nigeria, which was not supportive of this change in membership status.

There are also a number of organizations based on occupational category, including labor, business, student, and farm groups. The coordinating body for labor unions countrywide is the Nigerian Labor Congress, which has occasionally unified workers to strike to improve their status. This occurred during the First Republic, but due to the antiunion stance of many of the military regimes, the union's effectiveness in articulating political demands has been limited over the years. Most

businesses in the country are represented by three large associations: the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria; the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Mines, and Agriculture; and the Association of Small-Scale Industries. As westernized, elite-based organizations, they have strong ties to the country's political and bureaucratic leaders, thus enabling them to articulate demands that are often well received in policy-making and policy-implementing circles.

Similar to other countries, student groups have been active in organizing mass protests against government policies. This was especially the case during the first three republics, and it continues to be a challenge for the current democratically elected government. While farmers are the largest occupational group in the country, their interests are disparate depending on crop and/or region of residence, and they are too geographically dispersed to effectively organize their interests in ways that substantially impact the political process. Women have occasionally organized themselves into civil society organizations, but their scope and effectiveness have been limited.

Political Participation

For the most part, political participation has been limited to casting votes in occasional electoral contests, working on behalf of political candidates/parties during brief periods before these electoral contests (since during military rule, party activities were, for the most part, banned), and working with civil society organizations to impact the political process when possible. The opportunities have not been consistent, with the periods of military rule especially hostile to these kinds of activities. Given the prominence of ethnicity, religion, and region, these identities have proven to be the most common avenues of political expression and participation. Given the emotional attachment that people have with these identities, during periods of crisis, groups mobilized along these lines have engaged

in intergroup conflict that has occasionally become violent and politically destabilizing.

Belief Systems

Islam and Christianity are the dominant belief systems in the country, with Islam dominant in the northern, central, and western (to a lesser extent) regions, and Christianity throughout the south. Muslims in Nigeria do not speak with a single voice; the issue of Shar'iah law and relations with other Christians evoke a variety of responses ranging from violence to accommodation. Most Christians in the country belong to four major mainline churches: Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, and Baptist. Similar to other countries across sub-Saharan Africa, the evangelical and Pentecostal churches are rapidly growing in membership and popularity.

While most ethnic groups have corresponding religious belief systems that predate the advent of colonialism and Christianity, the Yoruba and Igbo traditions have been extensively studied, with many of their assumptions and rituals practiced alongside both Christianity and Islam.

Elites

Elites in Nigeria garner their legitimacy from a variety of occupational and identity-based affiliations. In the public sector, there are military, political (both traditional and Western), and bureaucratic elites whose positions of authority provide access to government resources. These elites distribute state resources both legally and illegally, often developing patron-client relations based on ethnic, religious, or regional commonalities. In the private sector, traders and owners of businesses across the country are also elites, using their wealth to influence public policy in many of the same ways as the west. Political leaders cannot rule the country without building coalitions with elites representing a myriad of interests, since the

political system in and of itself is not imbued with sufficient legitimacy from which to govern.

Gender

While women do not have substantial formal political, military, and economic power, they are leaders in the extended family, often remaining at home to manage family matters and, in rural areas, the farm. This power should not be underestimated, since Nigeria remains a predominantly rural and agricultural society, and since the extended family is a fundamental building block of Nigerian (and, more generally, African) society.

Political Economy

Nigeria has become dependent upon its oil reserves for its sustenance and for feeding a system of corruption that has mired the country in relative poverty amidst the opulence and wealth of the few. Even though the country is predominantly agricultural, the export earnings received from this sector represent a small fraction of the total earnings.

At independence, Nigeria was well positioned to be an economic leader on the continent. In addition to the oil reserves discovered during the 1950s, the country was self-sufficient in food, it had a relatively developed transportation infrastructure, and it produced and exported a wide variety of agricultural products, including palm oil and cocoa. When the price of oil surged in the 1970s, the Nigerian oil exports grew quickly along with the domestic economy, resulting in a rapid increase in government revenue. As a leading OPEC member, Nigerian oil income grew from $400 million in 1965 to $26 billion in 1980. Throughout the 1970s, the Nigerian government invested large sums of money in large-scale industrial

development plans, paying scant attention to agricultural production and other sectors that would have further diversified and strengthened the economy. Also, the government did not sufficiently invest in maintaining and improving public services (including water, electricity, and telephones), the transportation system, education, and health care. Given the lack of political transparency due to frequent, extraconstitutional alternations of power, and due to the lack of institutional capacity to suddenly manage such economic largesse, corruption quickly emerged as a major problem in the country.

When the price of oil plummeted on the world market during the 1980s, Nigeria was unprepared. Inflation grew at an alarming pace, and government surpluses quickly became deficits. A similar process also occurred in Mexico, where the mismanagement of oil revenue from the "boom" years of the 1970s resulted in endemic corruption and debt in the 1980s. While the Mexican debt was, for the most part, owed to private U.S. banks, Nigeria owed much of its money to multilateral lending agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

In 1985, the Babangida regime planned to implement a set of severe austerity measures recommended by the IMF, some of which included the privatization of government-held firms, reductions in government subsidies of basic goods and services, and a reduction in the size of bloated government bureaucracies. Despite the economic logic of these recommendations, the social cost to most of the Nigerian people was unbearable. As a result, Babangida slowed the pace of economic reform, with his successor Abacha ending this process during the early years of his rule. The current Obasanjo is attempting to address some of the challenges highlighted by the IMF, but balancing long-term economic logic with immediate social needs has been a challenge.

Currently, the oil sector provides 20 percent of gross domestic product, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and approximately 65 percent of budget revenues. The combination of high population growth rates and government inattention to the agricultural sector has transformed Nigeria from a net food exporter to a country that must import food to meet local needs. A major debt-restructuring deal was recently reached with the Paris Club, with $1 billion promised from the IMF contingent upon economic reforms (many of which were presented by the organization in 1986!). The current external debt hovers around $30 billion, with approximately 60 percent of the population below the poverty line, and per capita GDP estimated at $900.

In an effort to maximize Africa's ability to influence the global marketplace, Obasanjo has worked with his counterparts from South Africa (President Thabo Mbeki) and Algeria (President Bouteflika) to create the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The goal of NEPAD is to promote development on the continent by encouraging good governance, ending civil war, promoting foreign investment, liberalizing trade, and increasing foreign aid from advanced industrialized countries.

Major Public Policy Challenges

For the Fourth Republic to survive or, more optimistically, flourish, Nigeria's elected leaders face a myriad of economic and political challenges that will require a gradual and deliberate transformation bold enough to champion real change, but mindful that the military has the potential to return to power if given the opportunity. The future of this West African country hangs on this precarious balance!

Economic and Political Reform

In order to promote and sustain political and economic reform, the government needs to substantially reduce the endemic corruption that permeates the public and private sectors. The government needs the revenues lost to corruption, and financial transparency is essential for increased foreign direct investment in the country. While it is unrealistic to expect the government to withstand the shock of severe austerity measures such as those initially promised by Babangida, progress needs to be made in this regard. This will require tough but fair negotiations with the IMF that minimally meet the goals of the donor community (which maintains a dominant voting position in the IMF), while attending to the basic social service needs of the Nigerian people, many of whom rely on government intervention in the form of subsidies and tariffs.

With over 60 percent of the population at or below the poverty line, and many more dangerously close to the precipice of poverty, poverty alleviation is a priority for the government. Access to quality health care and education is crucial to this priority, as the government slowly but steadily nurtures a broadening of its middle class—a classic characteristic of stable democratic systems across the world.

Oil and the Environment

While oil extraction and refinement is necessary to Nigeria's economic well-being, this needs to be done in a way that does not have long-term environmental consequences. The government needs to strengthen environmental laws and its ability to enforce them. Multinational corporations need to partner with the government in this regard, since they are the main culprits of environmental degradation in the oil-rich Niger delta. From the Biafran civil war to the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his fellow human rights advocates, it is clear that political stability

in the delta region can only occur when the people living there have a genuine stake in a vibrant and environment-friendly oil sector.

Ethnic/Religious Tensions and Human Rights

The ethnic and religious tensions that have been detailed in this paper have long challenged political stability in the diverse country. Until a democratic system that addresses this diversity is devised, ethnicity and religion will continue to undermine national authority and, on occasion, foment intergroup violence.

Civil/Military Relations

In order to assure that the military remains in the barracks during times of political tension, Nigerians need to view civilian governments as the legitimate guarantors of the Nigerian nation, irrespective of political party in power and the ethnic/religious/regional composition of political leaders. Until civilian political legitimacy is established, civil/military relations will remain tenuous at best.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS has quickly emerged as one of the major public health challenges facing Nigeria specifically and African society more generally. In 2001, there was a 5.8 percent adult HIV prevalence rate in Nigeria, with approximately 170,000 AIDS-related deaths during the same year. Together with malaria and a host of preventable diseases, the Nigerian government needs to substantially improve the provision of adequate health care, especially to rural areas and poor neighborhoods in urban centers.

Regional Instability

Nigeria has been a leader in promoting regional stability, serving as the headquarters for the Economic Community for West African States. It is a founding member of this organization, comprised of 16 countries covering a population that exceeds 210 million people. ECOWAS, under Nigerian leadership, has played leading roles in promoting peace in neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone. The government has provided substantial financial support to the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG), along with committing large numbers of troops to both ending conflicts and promoting regional peace.

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