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SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Echoes of the 2011 national elections in Nigeria, when extreme violence rocked the north of the country, remain strong in the lead-up to the country's scheduled 2015 elections. This report, sponsored by the U.S. Institute of Peace, assesses the emerging political party system at this midpoint and searches for lessons from the country's historic pattern of election-related conflict. The author is grateful to both the U.S. Institute of Peace, which has a long-term concern with conflict analysis and resolution in Africa, and the George Mason University School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, which has a commitment to working with Nigerian counterparts on issues of conflict mitigation.

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Midterm Challenges in Nigeria

Elections, Parties, and Regional Conflict

Summary

- Nigeria is by far the largest country in the world with a population evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. The political party system, as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, requires that a presidential candidate achieve not only a plurality of votes but also at least 25 percent of the votes in two-thirds of the thirty-six states.
- Given Nigeria's great ethnoreligious diversity, creating "national unity" in Nigeria is a challenge, especially between its "Muslim north" and "Christian south." The aftermath of the last national elections in 2011 witnessed extreme violence in the country's north.
- With the next round of national elections scheduled for 2015, the positioning of political parties is in full swing, and grassroots pressures are growing in the far north, including from extremist religious elements that became emboldened in 2011.
- A new political party has been formed in opposition to the dominant party. The opposition All Progressive Congress is national in scope and ties together all six of the country's zones. It self-identifies as "progressive."
- One of the main political questions is whether President Goodluck Jonathan will run again. The northern wing of the dominant Peoples Democratic Party is considering selecting a northern candidate to run in 2015. The south-south faction of the party, led by President Jonathan, is trying to counter this move.
- The country's major political issues have strong regional implications, especially with regard to the activities of Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram and security issues in the north and violence in the Niger Delta in the south-south.
- The country's political dynamics also affect questions of sustainable development and regional economic disparities. Education and jobs are urgently needed in the north, which is being left behind from a development standpoint. Further political and ethnoreligious violence may make it even more difficult to initiate development reforms there.

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- At this midpoint between presidential elections, it is imperative to take stock of whether conflict resolution mechanisms are in place in the country as a whole and within the two evolving major political parties. Political coalitions are crucial, but how they are designed and implemented may determine whether there is stability or instability in the country.
- The next phase of party coalition building may determine the stability of the national system, in terms of regional balance, power sharing, and perceptions of fair play. Thus, real efforts should be directed towards the growing disjunction between the political elites and the grassroots communities they are intended to represent.

Nigeria Looks to 2015

The political system of Nigeria has historically been driven by demographics, regional identity factors, and access to resources. The official figures for Nigeria's population have grown from 140 million in 2006 (as per the census) to 170 million in 2013.¹ This high growth rate reflects an increasing youth bulge, significantly higher in the north than in the south. Within this context, social identity factors are increasingly used to assess whether all groups in Nigeria have access to the oil and gas revenues that are the mainstay of the country's economy. How these resources are being used is a key issue between the elites in all sectors and the various grassroots communities. In addition to normal budget allocations, official figures indicate that approximately \$6 billion in petroleum resources are being stolen per year.² Given these patterns, the governance of Nigeria has always been a challenge. Miscalculations in the country's political party and electoral system may lead to violence.

The spring of 2013 is halfway between the national elections of April 2011 and the scheduled elections of 2015. This report will assess the emerging political party system at this midpoint, recognizing that the situation is extremely fluid. Three obvious areas of concern are (1) the realignment of opposition parties into a single All Progressive Congress (APC), and how this realignment affects national and regional party dynamics; (2) the major political issues that are emerging as central to the 2015 campaigns, especially questions of regional security and sustainable development in the north; and (3) lessons learned from the country's historical pattern of election-related conflict—which, in one instance, led to civil war.

By way of background, since the Nigerian civil war (1967–70), numerous political devices have been tried to ensure that political parties and all branches of government reflect a “federal character,” that is, maintain an equal distribution of leadership posts and budget allocations across the country. The capital was moved from Lagos (on the coast) to Abuja (in the center of the country), and the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja was formed to provide equal and fair access to each of the six geocultural zones in the country.

National unity in Nigeria has always been a challenge, particularly given the country's great ethnic diversity. Today, Nigeria is by far the largest country in the world with a population that is half Muslim and half Christian. The political party system, as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, requires that a presidential candidate achieve not only a plurality of votes but also at least 25 percent of the votes in two-thirds of the thirty-six states. If this is not realized in the first election, a second election runoff is scheduled between the two highest vote getters, regardless of regional distribution. The unofficial political culture also requires that a presidential ticket contain a balance of candidates from the “Muslim north” and the “Christian south.” In addition, the dominant political party—the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)—has a charter requirement of “power shift” between the north and south every eight years.

Within this current system, there is clearly an imperative for parties with presidential aspirations to form coalitions prior to the initial election, not only to achieve votes but also to acquire the necessary regional distribution requirements. It is also clear that “incumbents”

have a strong advantage in terms of access to resources and political clout. The Independent National Electoral Commission is mandated to conduct elections in a free and fair manner. Election disputes are referred to election tribunals, in hopes of speedy conflict resolution. Yet the aftermath of the 2011 election in the north was one of extreme violence.

Party Positioning

Echoes of the 2011 national elections are still strong in 2013. In 2007, after eight years in office, the PDP candidate, President Olusegun Obasanjo (from Ogun, in the Christian south), stepped aside. Umaru Yar'Adua (from Katsina, in the Muslim north), also of the PDP, won the election, although he died in office in May 2010. His vice president, Goodluck Jonathan (from Bayelsa, in the Christian south), succeeded him and then ran successfully in his own right in 2011.

In 2011, after eight years of Obasanjo's PDP rule, and then two years of Jonathan's PDP rule, many in the north felt that it was still the north's turn for the presidency. The opposition-party candidate from the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Muhammadu Buhari, won the twelve far-northern states in 2011, but he lost dramatically in the south-south and southeast states. The north was feeling increasingly marginalized. The postelection violence in the north (especially Kaduna State) was the worst since the Nigerian civil war.

The political question in spring 2013 is whether Jonathan will run again in 2015. If he runs and wins, he will have served a total of ten years as president. Technically, the Constitution allows a person to be elected twice, and hence the courts have ruled that Jonathan is eligible. Others have argued that this defied the "spirit" (and possibly the "letter") of the term limits, since they would normally be regarded as eight years, not ten.³

At the same time, three additional political developments emerged in spring 2013: (1) the four major opposition parties merged into a single party, the APC; (2) several senior northern political figures in the PDP announced that Jonathan had signed a pledge in 2010–11 to run only for one term; and (3) a number of northern PDP potential presidential candidates have begun to emerge to challenge President Jonathan. In short, stresses are building up among the northern PDP governors and others to run a northern candidate in 2015 and stop a bid from Jonathan. They feel the logic of regional politics provides an advantage to the newly formed opposition party, which has strong roots and potential in the north.

Grassroots pressures are also growing in the far north, including from extremist religious elements that became emboldened in 2011. Thus the Boko Haram group(s), originally based in the northeast (especially Borno), and later the Ansaru group (based in Kano), have been creating havoc. They are attacking police, security, and authority installations, plus churches, beer halls, and other perceived manifestations of non-Muslim culture. In 2013, with the crisis in northern Mali in full swing, they have also included kidnapping foreigners, either for ransom or prisoner exchange. The porous borders of the north seem to indicate a broader Sahelian challenge.

The Emergence of a National Opposition Party

In the 2011 presidential election, the official number of votes cast was 38,305,084. Of these, Jonathan won 22,925,275 (57 percent); Buhari won 12,395,774 (31 percent); and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), with Nuhu Ribadu (who won in Osun State), and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), with Ibrahim Shekarau, together won 2,984,035 (12.8 percent). A fourth opposition party, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), was strong in the southeast, but it did not run a presidential candidate.⁴

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Even prior to the 2011 elections, there were major efforts to bring northern opposition leaders together. Meetings between Buhari, Atiku Abubakar (former PDP member and national vice president), and Attahiru Bafarawa (former governor of Sokoto State) were conducted, but no general agreement on candidates or coalitions resulted. Also, in the immediate run-up to the 2011 elections, the Buhari camp made every effort to link with the southwest-based ACN. In the end, the northern-based parties went their own ways, with Shekarau (from Kano) leading the ANPP and Buhari leading the CPC.

The ACN selected Nuhu Ribadu (originally from Adamawa),⁵ who tried to link the southwest with the north and run a national-focused campaign. Yet Ribadu only won one state in the southwest (Osun). If the election had gone to a second round, the links between the southwest and the north might have been renegotiated. Thus one of the apparent losers in the 2011 presidential race was the southwest, under the sway of Bola Tinubu (former governor of Lagos State), the power behind his successor in Lagos, Governor Babatunde Fashola. (Note: both Tinubu and Fashola are Muslim, but their religious affiliation does not seem to have political ramifications in the southwest.)

Formation of the All Progressive Congress. The southwest elected governors have remained overwhelmingly ACN in 2013. Governor Rauf Aregbesola of Osun, along with the other southwest governors of Ogun (Ibikunle Amosun), Lagos (Fashola), Ekiti (Kayode Fayemi), and Oyo (Abiola Ajimobi), formed a strong ACN block and have begun to explore coalition linkages. (The remaining southwest governor in Ondo State, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko of the Labor Party, has not yet committed to the new coalition.) Also in the southern zones, the governor of Edo (Adams Oshiomhole) in the south-south and the APGA governor of Imo (Rochas Okorocho) in the southeast have joined in the formation of the new national opposition coalition.

They joined with the northern opposition governors, including the ANPP governors of Yobe (Ibrahim Gaidam) and Borno (Kashim Shettima) in the northeast, the ANPP governor of Zamfara (Abdulaziz Yari) in the northwest, and the CPC governor of Nasarawa (Umaru Tanko al-Makura) in north central. Thus in February 2013, eleven governors and their four political parties (CPC, ANC, ANPP, and APGA) from all six geocultural zones committed to forming a national opposition party, the APC.

Political Uncertainties. The question remains as to whether the opposition governors can induce some of the PDP governors, plus smaller party governors (including an APGA governor in southeast), to join the APC. The key to this effort will be whether Jonathan decides to run, and what impact his decision will have on northern PDP governors (and other northern political heavy weights). Northern PDP governors—who constitute fifteen out of twenty-three national PDP governors—would be pressured either to insist that Jonathan not run in 2015, in favor of a northern candidate, or to decamp to the APC, assuming a northern candidate would be selected. In short, there are a number of political “known unknowns.”

Northern PDP Political Responses

Three obvious political reactions became evident in the north within the broad reaches of the incumbent PDP political spectrum: (1) elders such as General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida welcomed the emergence of a two-party system, even hinting that he might support the APC; (2) PDP governors, led by Niger State governor Babangida Aliyu, announced that they had a sworn agreement with Jonathan that he would not run in 2015; and (3) a number of PDP governors and other party notables came under scrutiny as possible presidential material, often paired with dynamic southern PDP governors as possible vice presidential candidates. Every move and meeting among PDP notables became grist for press and media speculation. Conspiracy theories abounded as to the possible Trojan horses planted in the

APC by the PDP—so too did speculation that the APC might fracture once the presidential ticket was selected, since not all opposition regions would be satisfied.

Responses to the two-party system. By all accounts, former military president General Babangida (Niger State) is one of the “kingmakers,” both in the north and in the country as a whole. An advocate of the two-party system, he was taken seriously when interviewed in the media and stated that “the emergence of the All Progressive Congress is good for the political development of the country.” He added that “he has been vindicated on the need for the country to have a two-party system. . . . He said, ‘I was a very good advocate of two-party system.’”⁶

The 2010 Jonathan commitment to one term. In February 2013, Aliyu dropped a political bombshell by announcing that on December 16, 2010, twenty out of twenty-seven PDP governors had a signed agreement with Jonathan stating that he would run only for one term. According to the agreement, a 2010 communiqué of the PDP National Executive Committee, “The governors . . . support President Goodluck Jonathan (GCFR) to contest the 2011 election as the PDP presidential candidate for a period of four years only.”⁷ As if to add fuel to the controversy, former president Obasanjo wrote a long editorial in the press, praising Jonathan for what he said would be a sacrifice in sticking to the one-term option: “We are impressed with the report that Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan has already taken a unique and unprecedented step of declaring that he would only want to be a one-term President. If so, whether he knows it or not, that is a sacrifice and it is statesmanly. Rather than vilify him and pull him down, we, as a party, should applaud and commend him and Nigerians should reward and venerate him.”⁸

Obasanjo also appeared to be working with Vice President Mohammed Namadi Sambo (former governor of Kaduna State) for “scuttling Jonathan’s second term ambition in 2015.”⁹ A spokesman for the presidency responded: “The Vice-President is under strict security watch by the Presidency.” The spokesman added that the vice president might not be considered in the 2015 election should Jonathan succeed in winning the primary.¹⁰ As further retribution, several Obasanjo stalwarts were sacked from the PDP National Working Committee.¹¹

Possible PDP northern presidential candidates. Meanwhile, a number of northern PDP governors are indicating interest in the 2015 nomination, including Aliyu, Sule Lamido of Jigawa State, Isa Yuguda of Bauchi State, Murtala Nyako of Adamawa State, Ibrahim Shema of Katsina State, Rabiu Kwankwaso of Kano State, and Aliyu Wamakko of Sokoto State.¹² In some cases, popular northern PDP governors have been linked with strong southern governors from the south-south or southeast. In particular, Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State, who is regarded as one of the most effective governors in the country, is linked to the Lamido campaign.¹³ Other trial balloons have begun to appear for younger northern political figures, such as House of Representatives Speaker Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, originally from Sokoto.¹⁴ There has even been media speculation about mass defection from the northern PDP, with as many as twelve governors reportedly considering joining the APC.¹⁵

All eyes are clearly on President Jonathan to discern his intentions. His stock reply has been that he will not make any decision until 2014. Hence, the political tensions continue to rise, as all the stakeholders are making contingency plans for widely diverse scenarios.

The Jonathan Faction

The Jonathan faction of the PDP has not sat idle during this period. Efforts were made to remove possible dissidents from the PDP inner committees. This even extended to the PDP Board of Trustees, including such senior figures as Abubakar (Adamawa State) and Umar Ghali Na’Abba (Kano State).¹⁶ In addition to purging the PDP central leadership, the Jonathan fac-

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tion engaged in at least three other initial tasks: (1) ensuring that court challenges to his eligibility are decided favorably, (2) encouraging the idea of an automatic ticket selection for the president during the PDP primary, and (3) wooing various northern political figures to the president's side.

Disposing of the court challenge. In early March 2013, an Abuja High Court declared that Jonathan would be eligible to run for president in 2015, stating that “the president’s assumption of office in 2010 as the result of the death of then President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua was caused by ‘doctrine of necessity’ motion adopted by the National Assembly” and thus “he is eligible to further seek his party’s ticket through the party’s primary election and to run for office in 2015.”¹⁷

Whether this ruling will be appealed remains to be seen, but Section 137 of the 1999 Constitution states that eligibility is limited to two general elections, with no mention of limits based on the number of years in office. The question of commitments to a single term is a matter of intraparty determination.

An automatic ticket selection? Another development within the inner circle of the PDP has been the idea that an incumbent president should be given the right of first refusal, in lieu of a primary fight. This idea may have already been put into practice, although it is bound to be controversial, given the circumstances. According to media reports, the aim is “to pattern the presidential contest after that of the United States of America, where an incumbent is given express ticket to contest the election.”¹⁸ This de facto development has already produced backlash, both within the party and the press. According to the Daily Independent, “There is nothing written on stone that an incumbent President or Governor in the United States of America cannot be challenged in a party primary.”¹⁹

Wooing northern political figures. Senior operatives of the PDP have finally begun to counter possible defections among northern political figures. According to one media report, “Signals that President Goodluck Jonathan has started plotting how to grab the presidential ticket of the Peoples Democratic party for the 2015 election emerged ... with the President reaching out to respective former governors of Zamfara and Borno states, Ahmed Yerima and Ali Modu-Sheriff. ... The two ex-governors are members of the All Nigeria Peoples Party. The two former governors, it was gathered, would help the President neutralize the anti-Jonathan sentiment in the north where top politicians are clamouring for power shift from the South.”²⁰

In short, as of spring 2013, the “permanent campaign” is in full swing, with “carrots and sticks” being applied by the team surrounding the president. Shifting loyalties can often be induced with the enormous monetary resources of the presidency. Personal calculations may involve “rights” to future high-office positions. Clearly, the office of governor is a key to both the political and financial rewards. But with nineteen of the current thirty-six governors due to complete their two terms in 2015, the question of “protection” after leaving office is very real. Potential rivals within the party can be intimidated by threats of “scrutiny” or “surveillance.”²¹ Threats of investigations by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission also loom over the heads of maverick governors.

Meanwhile, in a parallel universe outside the elite bargaining process, the real issues of domestic security and the economy are simmering without apparent resolution. It is this disjunction between political elites and grassroots communities that may determine the propensity for stability or violence in the upcoming elections. Most educated people in Nigeria are aware that certain key issues will predominate in the next election cycle, insofar as there are substantive issues other than access to power. Thus, quite apart from money politics—where huge amounts are expended without any real regulation—the issues of personal security, education, jobs, corruption, and rule of law are there for all to see. How they are dealt with may determine whether there is political system stability or violent

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breakdown. This also requires some consideration of the role of the military and security services, either as fostering stability or contributing to grassroots disaffection not only in the north but also throughout the country.

Major Political Issues

Is there a sense of urgency in the political discussions regarding basic issues in Nigeria? Or is the rapid development of the Lagos–Ibadan corridor (plus the Abuja “bubble”) creating a euphoria that all is well throughout the country? How the political system handles issues such as domestic security, education, jobs, and corruption may determine whether Nigeria achieves its true potential, or whether it devolves into a failing state.

President Jonathan recognizes that the Nigeria-based Islamist terror group Boko Haram (“Western education is prohibited”) is a threat in the north and beyond, but he does not publicly connect the causes to underlying conditions in Nigeria. According to one media report, “The president denies that alleged corruption in Nigeria is helping fuel the violence. He also denies charges that Nigerian soldiers have carried out human rights abuses against civilians under the guise of fighting terrorism.”²²

On the other hand, Justice Dahiru Musdapher, the highly respected former chief justice of Nigeria, offers words of warning: “More than ever before in the history of Nigeria, the scourge of terrorism poses a great challenge to the Nigerian State. Our slide into anarchy has assumed dangerous dimensions, perhaps, beyond the capacity of our security agencies to deal with the menace effectively. The Boko Haram insurgency, political violence, corruption, nepotism, tribalism, indiscipline, abduction and kidnappings, armed robbery, murder and extortions, bombings of places of worship are all indicators of a failing state. . . . Nigeria is clearly a nation at war with itself. The path we are treading is a threat to the continued peace, unity and prosperity of this land we call home.”²³

This deep concern with domestic security, jobs, corruption, and national unity may well be underlying issues in the 2015 two-party elections. How they are addressed may affect the levels and types of violence surrounding the run-up to and aftermath of elections and, in some areas, may determine whether elections can even be held.

Regional Security Issues

It is beyond the scope of this report to provide background on the growth and spread of violent extremist groups in northern Nigeria and beyond. The Boko Haram movement, which calls for an Islamic state, started in the northeast states of Borno and Yobe and has spread since 2009 to all parts of the north, and probably to neighboring countries.²⁴ In 2011–12, a breakaway faction of the movement called Ansaru—reportedly based in Kogi, but probably based in Kano—has further complicated the threat to the northern Nigerian establishment.²⁵ Ansaru may have a broader regional reach within Sahelian West Africa (and even North Africa). The group encourages kidnapping “foreigners” but strongly opposes killing fellow Muslims.²⁶

At the same time, there have been increased demands from groups in the Niger Delta—both violent and nonviolent—for more autonomy and control over oil resources. The real question for the Nigerian political system is how to respond to these existential challenges to the unity of the country, at a time when the one hundred year anniversary celebration of the merger of north and south Nigeria is approaching in 2014.

Boko Haram and offshoots. How the domestic security issue fits into Nigerian political debates, often articulated through the media, is a basic question. There are several distinct voices in analyzing and debating this issue: the international community, government leaders, opposition leaders, civil society spokesmen, and traditional leaders.

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Since the bombing of the United Nations (UN) building in Abuja in the summer of 2011, the international community has paid close attention to “terrorist” groups in Nigeria and their possible links to international nonstate networks. In some cases, there is an obvious focus on al-Qaeda links. In other cases, there is more of a focus on the unique dimensions of the Nigerian case. The international community has increasingly come to render its own judgments as to the relationship between root causes, extremist violence, and government responses in Nigeria and beyond. These open-source debates are often in the context of possible Western policy responses, or even UN responses, especially in light of the French military engagement in Mali.²⁷

Some Western assessments of how Nigeria’s president is handling these challenges tend to support the Jonathan administration’s claim that the problems stem from a broader, more regional set of factors. These assessments could potentially lead to increased cooperation and encouragement from the West. This view was strengthened after Sambo Dasuki took over as national security adviser from Andrew Azazi in summer 2012.

Other international assessments are more critical of the underlying socioeconomic drivers of violence in Nigeria, including the exacerbating role of Nigerian military and security forces. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch issued reports condemning perpetrators of violence, ranging from the insurgent groups to the Nigerian military and police. These analyses of underlying causes tend to focus on domestic causes and government policies and warn that the government’s own policies are driving thousands to Boko Haram. Notes one report,

Unless Goodluck Jonathan changes his methods, the situation in Nigeria stands to deteriorate. The president persistently denies claims by rights groups that government corruption and poverty are among the root causes of the terrorist problem in Nigeria and argues we “shouldn’t play politics with Boko Haram.” Instead, Jonathan seems intent on tackling the problem with force and terror, a tactic that clearly is not working. Nigeria’s leader is using the prevalent anti-terrorist sentiment, exacerbated by the conflict in Mali, as an excuse to ignore the numerous flaws in his government and the underlying causes of the terrorism. The people of Nigeria are increasingly being asked to choose between the radical Islamist group and the government’s own brand of terrorism.²⁸

This external critique may echo the sentiments of many in the opposition parties in northern Nigeria. Opposition leader Buhari has long maintained that the Jonathan administration is incompetent and that the key is economic development in the north, and he calls for an end to corruption. Even within the Jonathan administration, there are many voices in terms of analysis and policy recommendations. Jonathan has announced that there will be no amnesty for Boko Haram. Yet northern political voices within the PDP often call for dialogue. The Sultan of Sokoto, seen as friendly to the regime, has called for “amnesty,” similar to the policy with insurgents in the Niger Delta. (Surprisingly, the president has publicly contradicted the sultan on this issue.²⁹)

The situation is so serious that few political or traditional leaders wish to make it a public issue.³⁰ The gravity of the threat and the need for concerted counter measures was underscored in January 2013, when there was an attempt on the life of the highly respected Emir of Kano, Ado Bayero, age eighty-three.³¹ (There was a previous attempt on the life of the Shehu of Borno.)

Most of the large northern cities—Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, Maiduguri—are faced with major security challenges and fears of uncertainty. The partial exception so far is Sokoto in the far northwest, home to the Sultan of Sokoto. National Security Adviser Dasuki is the son of a

previous sultan and has been active in trying to coordinate a multipronged counter narrative to the extremist groups.³² It is almost as though the Sokoto Caliphate itself is under attack, along with traditional leaders in Borno, from a younger generation of northern grassroots preachers and their followers from the “dispossessed.”³³ Traditional religious leaders in the north are increasingly fearful of criticizing Boko Haram in the belief that they will become targets for assassination.

These mounting tensions and political accusations have begun to spill over into finger-pointing. For example, former president Olusegun Obasanjo has reportedly stated that the blame for not properly handling the Boko Haram threat rests with President Jonathan.³⁴ In March 2013, Jonathan answered critics who stated that he was fearful of traveling to Yobe and Borno by making his first trip to those states since assuming the presidency. While there, he created a firestorm by making his own criticisms of the local elders and political figures.

Such tensions take a more ominous turn when stresses within the military begin to appear. As Nigerian newspaper *Punch* reports, “The authorities of the Nigerian Army have put a retired Major General under close watch over the allegations of nepotism against the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika. Also being closely watched are a few of the accomplices of the general, who are strongly suspected to have aided him in whipping up ethnic sentiments in the army.”³⁵ In short, military, political, and civil society forces are being carefully monitored by the government.

By April 2013, political stress levels were rising. Nigerian troops were being deployed to fight terrorism in Mali, and there were crosscurrents in the security leadership and within the political elites regarding how to best confront terrorism. The obvious causes of northern grassroots disaffection—such as poverty, corruption, lack of educational opportunities (including the yawning gap between Koranic education and “Western” education), and political marginalization—began to get lost in the immediate challenges of how to ensure domestic security. At the same time, the economic gap between the north and the south (especially the commercial capital of Lagos) and the extravagant lifestyles of those in the political capital of Abuja provided a sense of grievance, which could be captured by the new opposition party.

While the north is feeling marginalized, other groups and regions in Nigeria are also making their claims on security attention. The most significant region is the Niger Delta. This is not only the oil-producing zone but also the home turf of President Jonathan. Within this zone, there is extensive focus on the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

The Niger Delta. In the oil-rich delta, tens of thousands of barrels of oil are being stolen each day. Some of this theft is committed by criminal groups, some by powerful political and business interests, and some by local people who are angry about their despoiled environment and their destitute living standards. The net result is a plethora of protest groups in the zone, some nonviolent and some extremely violent. According to the 1999 Constitution, all subsoil minerals, including oil, belong to the entire Nigerian nation, not just to those on the land where they are found or adjacent to the offshore reserves on the continental shelf. Since oil is the lifeline of the Nigerian petrostate, the security challenges in this zone affect the entire country.

With the election of President Jonathan in 2011, the south-south in general—and Bayelsa State in particular—have been supportive of their “native son.” The policy of previous president Umaru Yar’Adua regarding amnesty for youth gangs who renounce violence, turn in weapons, and commit to job training has been continued under Jonathan. The umbrella militant group, MEND, has included elements ranging from those who want independence for the Delta, to those who want all or a larger portion of the oil resources, to those who want recompense for environmental damage, to those who would be satisfied with an east-west road system linking the Delta with Lagos, and to those who demand that oil companies provide more community development facilities. In cases where there have been overt challenges to the Nigerian state, the military has responded with force, mainly through the Joint Task Force.

The obvious causes of northern grassroots disaffection—such as poverty, corruption, lack of educational opportunities and political marginalization—began to get lost in the immediate challenges of how to ensure domestic security.

Within the violent faction of MEND, there have been kidnappings and killings and occupation of oil facilities. Sometimes the political factions of MEND are at odds with those who have declared war on the Nigerian state. Public statements are often exchanged between factions. For example, in January 2013, “Jomo Gbomo” (a nom de guerre) countered the supporters of Henry Okah, a radical leader who had fled to South Africa and was later apprehended, tried, and convicted. Delta supporters threatened havoc if Okah was not released, but Jomo Gbomo replied to them, stating that Okah was not a leader or founder of MEND.³⁶

The major issue of domestic security and the Delta hinges on whether the 1999 Constitution, with its land use clauses and its distributable pool distribution formulae, will continue to serve as guiding principles within a system of democratic federalism. Thus, the national unity issue can become an existential challenge to the state. The periodic calls for a National Sovereign Conference, especially by south-south political leaders, may be interpreted in other parts of the country as an attempt at a power and resource grab. When such calls are coupled with ethno-religious claims, the challenges of domestic security are clear, especially when the president comes from such a region.

Sustainable Development Issues

In April 2012, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, called for a “Marshall Plan” for northern Nigeria, to upgrade basic living standards and begin to bridge the gap between northern and southern Nigerians. Later, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton raised this issue with President Jonathan in London. Both the World Bank and the European Union have begun to formulate large-scale sustainable development projects for northern Nigeria. Clearly, much of the impetus for such initiatives is the concern about youth education and unemployment in the north creating fertile grounds for extremist religious elements. As of April 2013, not much has been done. What then might be the political issues surrounding this issue in the 2015 election cycle?

Regional disparities. According to Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics, Sokoto, with an 81.2 percent poverty rate, is the poorest state in the country. Of the nine other states with a poverty rate above 70 percent—Adamawa, Bauchi, Ebonyi, Gombe, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Plateau, and Zamfara—only Ebonyi is not located in the north. The average poverty rate of the states in the northwest, northeast, and north-central geopolitical zones are 71.4 percent, 69.1 percent, and 60.7 percent, respectively. Notes one media source, “Compounding these crises that the [northern] region faces is the absence of major industrial concerns that could have absorbed the increasing number of unemployed young people. Little wonder corruption in and around the seat of government has led to indiscipline, social atrophy, economy deprivation and social injustice, aggravating chaos and violence that now threaten national security.”³⁷

Part of the political problem for leaders is the visible gap between those who are doing well in the oil-driven economy and those who are left behind. On the question of entitlements for public servants, the Adamu Fika Committee on the Review of the Reform Process in the Public Service submitted its report to the federal government in February 2013, declaring: “It is certainly not morally defensible by any criteria of social justice that such a huge amount of public funds is consumed by 0.013 percentage of the total populace.”³⁸

This economic gap is visible not only within the north but also throughout Nigeria. Western media run regular articles on the big-city slums in places like Lagos.³⁹ While overall statistics for annual growth in Nigeria appear to be robust (7.5 percent), as the *Economist* notes, “Nigeria is famous for corruption, yet at issue is more than thievery. Members of the elite systematically loot state coffers, then subvert the electoral system to protect themselves. Everybody knows it, and a few straight arrows in government talk about it openly. Perhaps half the substantial (but misreported) oil revenues of Africa’s biggest oil producer

The average poverty rate of the states in the northwest, northeast, and north-central geopolitical zones are 71.4 percent, 69.1 percent, and 60.7 percent, respectively.

go missing. Moderate estimates suggest that at least \$4 billion–\$8 billion is stolen every year, money that could pay for schools and hospitals. . . . Yet not a single politician has been imprisoned for graft. The day that Nigeria works properly, the battle for Africa’s future will have been won.”⁴⁰

Thus, the international community links the issues of poverty, lack of schools and hospitals, corruption, and elections. The question is whether Nigerian political parties make the same connections in their campaign platforms. The one clear example of a crackdown on official corruption occurred under the military regime of Buhari (1984–85), when he put most of the governors in jail. While this was popular at the grassroots level, the policy was reversed by General Babangida in August 1985 when he took over in a counter-coup and released the political prisoners.

Buhari’s reputation of being intolerant of corruption, and his unsuccessful attempts at running for president in 2003, 2007, and 2011, raised the profile of the corruption issue. However, the vilification of Buhari by the southern media and the politics of religious identity mitigated against him having success in the south. The intense desire among his followers for “progressive” change manifested into widespread violence following the election of 2011. How the new opposition coalition (APC) will handle these issues remains to be seen.

While many challenges of sustainable development apply to Nigeria in general, one challenge applies to the north in particular—specifically, how to link education and jobs with the prevalent pattern of Koranic education. There is also the challenge of increasing funding for universities to upgrade quality, provide for good teacher training, and offer alternative paths for technical and practical training.

Education and jobs in the north. In order to maintain “federal-character” balance in the country, three new universities were approved for the north—in Yobe, Zamfara, and Kebbi—in January 2013. Thus, every state in the federation will have a federal university, with the new ones scheduled to launch by 2014.⁴¹ Yet the conditions of Nigerian universities still suffer from the neglect during the military period, and there is a lot of catch up needed.⁴²

It is beyond the scope of this report to outline all the components of the education challenges in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that the political issue of education in the north is directly linked to two other issues: (1) practical training for jobs and (2) how to link up the Koranic schools. The latter issue is sensitive, since there are national guidelines on what can be taught in schools. But the official figure of ten million children in Koranic and *ilm* (advanced knowledge of Islam) schools, which is probably much higher in reality, suggests that a major effort must be made to link national education priorities (such as English and math) with the traditional study of the Koran. At present, there are few jobs for those who finish memorizing the religious texts. This is the pool of youth that may be enticed by fringe groups, including violent extremists.

The key to these challenges will be political leadership. President Jonathan is a teacher of science and should understand the challenges. But he will need the help of those from the core north to address the cultural and religious issues mentioned earlier. Education is a widely popular “public good” in Nigeria, and every politician promises “more.” Yet the lack of implementation leaves a residue of bitterness. Boko Haram’s core message—“Western education is prohibited”—should be a wake-up call to the political class.

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Elections and Regional Conflict

The question in many quarters is whether the national elections of 2015 will be a tipping point to more violence and what can be done to assuage such fears. Extremist violence in the north has closed down important health programs, such as polio eradication.⁴³ Travel in the north is extremely precarious. It is not clear that election workers and National

Youth Service Corp monitors will be willing to serve when voting facilities are threatened by extremists.

Traditional leaders and religious leaders may find that their hands are tied during periods of electoral stress. The Sultan of Sokoto has made every effort to extend his friendship to Christian counterparts, although he is faced with many issues of balancing religious freedom with security needs.⁴⁴ The Christian Association of Nigeria seems to be split between Roman Catholics and more evangelical and Pentecostal elements.⁴⁵ How such formal religious groups are seen to relate to the incumbent government is an ongoing issue.

Elections and Violence

Incumbents have an enormous advantage in Nigerian elections. They control the military, security, and police. They control the treasury. They control the election process and timing. They control the “rules of the game,” including rally restrictions and available television time. Yet there have always been strong opposition parties in Nigeria, often regionally based. Ironically, when opposition parties put national coalitions together, the stakes become higher, and often the stress levels rise.

Past violence. The demise of the First Republic came in 1966 after the elections of 1964 and 1965, which saw the creation of two national coalition parties. Tensions in the southwest resulted in rerun elections in that zone, and the alliance pattern caused a split between those elements linked to the north and those linked to the southeast. Junior officers intervened with assassinations, and the chaos that followed included the civil war (1967–70).

The demise of the Second Republic came in 1983, after the summer 1983 elections in which the newly oil-rich politicians caused much public unrest by rigging the elections and squandering resources. There was a national alliance pattern. Senior officers (including Buhari) intervened to stabilize the situation in a bloodless coup.

The demise of the Third Republic came after General Babangida set up a two-party system: the right-leaning Republicans and the left-leaning Social Democrats. The alliance coalitions were such that portions of the south-south and southeast boycotted the election of 1992. Babangida annulled the results, which seemed to favor a southwestern-northern coalition candidate.

In short, national coalition patterns based on regional alliances, in situations of high stakes and grassroots tensions, will remain a challenge for the Fourth Republic. The violence in the northwest zone after the 2011 elections was compounded by the feeling throughout the far north that the incumbent party was not on a level playing field. Obviously, the inability of the far northern party to put a national coalition together was the fatal flaw.

Hence, the national opposition party formed in 2013—the APC—was intended to provide a national coalition. It is seen by itself (and many others) as slightly left, while the PDP is seen by many as slightly right. But this coalition pattern does not in itself guarantee an end to social violence. The main concern will probably be whether the northern PDP governors can provide a “northern” candidate to challenge whoever will emerge from the APC coalition. (It is by no means clear that an APC candidate will be from the north. Southwest and southeast governors all have their “eyes on the prize.”)

In short, the social violence that sometimes characterizes Nigerian elections and their aftermath includes not only spontaneous eruptions but also the possibility that the military will intervene. The difference between a senior officer coup that attempts to stabilize the situation and a junior officer coup (or attempted coup) that attempts a “revolution” is day and night. Knowing this, the incumbent government will monitor both junior and senior officers. However, this itself is not a confidence-building measure, and when played up in the press, may be a contributing factor to more violence and encourage first-mover advantage.

Patterns of violence. The fact that at present there are quasi-insurrectionist grassroots phenomena in both the far north and the south-south (Delta) makes it difficult to project how these factors may contribute to election-management challenges. Hence, coalition patterns become even more important, especially in terms of the presidential and vice-presidential selection. A PDP ticket, for example, that included a Jigawa State governor (northwest) at the top and a Rivers State governor (south-south) at the bottom would be perceived quite differently than the current PDP ticket, which includes a president from Bayelsa (south-south) and a vice president from Kaduna (northwest).

Another factor would be whether the newly formed opposition party can be “broken” by the “carrots and sticks” of the incumbent party. Hence, certain zones may be weaned off, leaving politicians and their followers in those states disgruntled. If the existing incumbents run again for the PDP, the challenges will clearly come from disaffections in the north. Since the north believes it is “their turn,” this could have consequences. The question is whether such consequences can be managed in a way that strengthens the Nigerian polity rather than tears it apart. The nightmare scenario throughout the federation is a junior officer coup, whether successful or not, that ends up decapitating the political elite and leaving the country torn and leaderless. In such a situation, the question becomes whether the institutions of the Fourth Republic are strong enough to ride out the personality politics, often driven by identity politics, whether ethnic, religious, or regional.

Toward a Stable National System: Lessons and Challenges

Participants in the Nigerian political system often comment that the main challenge is building strong institutions that can weather political storms and ensure that implementation of programs is efficient, clean, and effective. At best, “leaders” provide direction; “managers” provide implementation. Both are needed.

The lessons learned from the civil war (1967–70) include power sharing, power shifting, and maintaining a federal character. The purpose behind the shift in the federal capital in the late 1970s from Lagos to Abuja was to symbolize equal access to power. One of the unintended consequences of the shift to a Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) was that the oil-driven economy tends to centralize power and then redistributes resources down to the needs of the 36 states and 774 local government areas. Hence, there is enormous incentive to control the center, especially the executive branch.

The efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission to institutionalize voting procedures in an accountable and transparent manner is still a work in progress, despite the best efforts of the highly regarded current chair, Professor Attahiru Jega. His team must be seen as neutral; executive oversight must not include executive tampering with the process. There is nothing more destabilizing than the perception that elections are not free and fair.

Presidential elections can be tipping points in the tensions of a fast growing nation, with unequal distribution of resources and with strong regional identity politics. The key is to engage in comprehensive, strategic planning well in advance of such elections. Such planning is quite separate from the strategies of the political parties and individuals involved in the political system. It is dedicated to the unity and well-being of the country as a whole, and not to any one segment or component.

Historically, regional politics have both provided the glue holding the federation together and the tensions pulling it apart. How this is managed by each upcoming generation will determine whether Nigeria takes its rightful place as a democratic nation in the community of nations or whether instability will prevail and cripple attempts at growth and development.

The challenges at present in the far north and in the Delta seem to undermine the whole idea of a unified Nigeria. It is important to think through the narratives and counternarratives at play. Obviously, a military-security solution is only a stopgap at best; at worst, it can exacerbate tensions. Leadership will have to emerge to provide direction to the country at this time of peril, and effective managers will be needed to help achieve optimal outcomes.

Conclusions: Elections, Parties, and Regional Conflict

The challenge of democratic elections is linked to conflict management. In terms of prevention, this may be done through political institutions, including party charters with provisions for power sharing and power shifting. When party charters are tailored to the needs of incumbent individuals, they undermine the legitimacy of the entire process.

At this midterm point between presidential elections, it is imperative to take stock of whether conflict resolution mechanisms are in place in the country as a whole, and within the two evolving major political parties, to forestall election violence. Political coalitions are crucial, but how these are designed and implemented may determine system stability or instability.

Conflict management is an ongoing process, and regional conflict has always been a challenge, often resolved at the elite bargaining level. Prevention requires checks and balances within the political system. It also requires a vision of national unity that overrides the various contending forces at play. Reliance on the military invites even further intrusion on civilian rule.

Yet elections also give the grassroots communities an opportunity to express themselves, either peacefully at the ballot box or violently in the streets. The next phase of party coalition building may determine the stability of the national system, in terms of regional balance, power sharing, and perceptions of fair play.

Thus, real efforts should be directed to the growing disjunction between the political elites and the grassroots communities they are intended to represent. Although Nigeria is the “giant of Africa,” it is not “too big to fail.” It may have thus far survived attempts to dismember the union—such as during the civil war and associated failed elections, military intrusions, and grassroots pogroms—but to stabilize the national system, lessons learned about party systems and elections will need to prevail. Will the 2015 elections become a model for how a major petrostate of enormous complexity can overcome the challenges of creating unity from diversity?

The remaining question is whether President Jonathan will choose to run. If he does run, how will the north react? All signs point to his candidacy. But he has sworn to wait until 2014 to make his final decision. That may turn out to be a fateful fork in the road in terms of peaceful elections and democratic evolution.

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