

# Introduction: Nigeria in Global Perspective

With a population of more than 140 million, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It is the fourth largest member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), after Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and, with Turkey and Iran, has the sixth largest number of Muslims in the world. Only Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Egypt have larger Muslim populations. Most important, it stands as the largest country with an approximate balance between its Muslim and Christian populations. Nigeria's ethnolinguistic and religious diversity make it one of the most complex countries in the world, and it is the need to accommodate these many strands that has been the driving force in the country since its independence in 1960, and especially since the civil war of 1967–70.

Nigeria is the seventh largest oil producer in the world. With the price of oil hovering between \$40 and \$98 per barrel between 2004 and 2007, the windfall profits to Nigeria have been considerable. As of June 2007, Nigeria had well over \$48 billion in the international banking system after having paid off its \$12 billion discounted debt to the Paris Club. These reserves are over and above its recurrent budget allocations. In turn, this oil-boom phenomenon has affected Nigerian politics in fundamental ways.

Since returning to civilian rule in 1999, after fifteen years of martial rule, Nigeria has conducted a major experiment in democratic federalism through its thirty-six states and 774 local government areas. With the two-term limit of the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo expiring, the elections in spring 2007 were critical to a civilian-to-civilian transition in a volatile political environment. In 2000, the twelve far-northern governors had reintroduced sharia law in the criminal domain in their states, which are largely Muslim. The Nigerian Christian community, largely in the south and the middle belt, worried about the implication for the future of Nigeria. But much of this tension has lessened in the seven years since. This is partly due to the "national unity" and "Nigeria is one" approach that all political parties have tried to adopt, working across regional and religious cleavages in national coalitions.

Nigeria is probably the least well known of the Muslim world's pivotal states. Its role as the dominant African state, its extraordinary influence in West Africa, its significance as a major world oil producer, and its experience

with democratic rule since 1999 make Nigeria a critical country, especially in its relations with the United States.

## Organization of the Chapters

The author's experiences in Nigeria over the past four decades have contributed to general observations throughout this volume. Because this is an interpretative essay, an effort has been made to avoid extensive footnotes, except to denote referenced sources and, in some cases, to provide illustrative background detail.

This first chapter provides an overview of Nigeria, focusing on its comparative position within the Muslim world, and includes brief sketches of the following subjects to provide the foundational context: demographics, religion, and ethnicity; urbanization and education; oil, agriculture, and industry; income distribution and links to the global economy; and national and military politics.

Chapter 2 delves into the sources of Nigerian influence and significance. These include more detail on the idea of Nigeria as a pivotal state in the Muslim world, especially in relation to other Muslim states. The argument is made that Nigeria's distinctiveness revolves around its nearly equal demographic divide between Muslims and Christians. The Nigerian model of "federal character" is outlined, which balances the national demographics through representation in the executive branches. The concept of cooperation among "people of the book"—particularly between Muslims and Christians—is also articulated. Finally, Nigeria's key role in Africa and in the world is explored.

Chapter 2 also explores Muslim organizations in Nigeria, including the Muslim Sufi brotherhoods and Izala, student and youth organizations, women's organizations, national umbrella organizations, and antiestablishment networks, such as groups identified as "Shiites" and "Taliban" but whose real orientations are unclear. Finally, Nigerian links to transnational systems in Africa and beyond are discussed—for instance, nonstate and state-sector links—as well as issues of international security and economic development.

Chapter 3 discusses the challenges of nation building in Nigeria, including establishing a workable political system, consolidating rule of law, developing capacities for conflict resolution, facilitating economic development, and stemming corruption at all levels.

Chapter 4 explores pathways of change, including the politics of alternative futures for Nigeria—for example, the Shell Oil "Vision 2010" projections for Nigeria and certain worst-case scenarios—and looks at power sharing and the power-shifting aspects of the country's 2007 election. It also explores pathways of political change, such as partition, centralization, and democratic federalism.

Chapter 5 assesses four dimensions of U.S. engagement with Nigeria. These include military and security relations; diplomatic and political relations; economic, business, and educational relations; and cultural, religious, and non-governmental organization (NGO) relations. In addition, some suggestions are offered on the future of U.S. relations with Nigeria.

The last chapter evaluates Nigeria's role as a pivotal Muslim state.

## Profiles of Nigeria

While hard data on socioeconomic patterns in Nigeria have always been difficult to establish, various statistical estimates are available. Where possible, U.S. government public data are used in this overview, supplemented by the author's best judgment.

### *Demographics, Religion, and Ethnicity*

The most recent census in Nigeria was held on March 21–28, 2006, but the release of the census results was postponed at least twice by the National Population Commission (NPC).<sup>1</sup> Finally, in the run-up to the 2007 national elections, the commission announced the results. With a total population of 140,003,542, there are 71,709,859 men and 68,293,683 women in the country. According to this census data, an estimated 42.3 percent of Nigeria's population is aged 0–14 years, 54.6 percent 15–64 years, and 3.1 percent 65 years and older. The population growth is estimated at 2.38 percent each year and the median age is 18.7 years old. The estimated total fertility rate (average number of children per woman) is 5.49. The census estimates life expectancy to be 47.08 years, although the World Bank estimates this to be 45.3 years. The census also showed that Kano State in the far north has the largest number of people (see table 1).

The 2006 census, as per Nigeria's last census in 1991, did not ask questions about ethnicity or religion. These are still sensitive questions in a country that has a strong history of geocultural regionalism and religious diversity. This sensitivity is reflected in the political tensions that have surrounded every census since independence in 1960.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the release of the 2006 census data, the 1991 census had been widely used as the basis for recent population-related estimates and projections. For example, U.S. government estimates put the population of Nigeria in July

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1. For background, see National Population Commission, *NPC News* 5, no. 3 (September 2006). Also see National Population Commission, *State Forum for Stakeholders on the Status of 2006 Census* (November 2006).

2. See "Census Provisional Result Out October, says NPC Chairman," *ThisDay*, April 20, 2006; "Census 2006: Just How Many Heads Were Missing?" *Vanguard*, March 26, 2006; "Census: Kano Fears Citizens May Lose Rights," *Daily Triumph*, March 24, 2006; and "60,000 Police to Monitor Census in Katsina," *Daily Triumph*, March 21, 2006.

TABLE 1 PROVISIONAL POPULATION TOTAL CENSUS, 2006

State	Persons	State	Persons
Abia	2,833,909	Kano	9,383,682
Adamawa	3,168,101	Katsina	5,792,578
Akwa-Ibom	3,920,208	Kebbi	n/a
Anambra	n/a	Kogi	3,278,487
Bauchi	4,676,465	Kwara	2,371,089
Bayelsa	1,703,358	Lagos	9,013,534
Benue	4,219,244	Nasarawa	1,863,275
Borno	4,151,193	Niger	3,950,249
Cross River	2,888,966	Ogun	3,728,098
Delta	4,098,391	Ondo	3,441,024
Ebonyi	2,173,501	Osun	3,423,535
Edo	3,218,332	Oyo	5,591,589
Fkiti	2,384,212	Plateau	3,178,712
Enugu	3,257,298	Rivers	5,185,400
FCT Abuja	1,404,201	Sokoto	3,696,999
Gombe	2,353,879	Taraba	2,300,736
Imo	3,934,899	Yobe	2,321,591
Jigawa	4,348,649	Zamfara	3,259,846
Kaduna	6,066,562	<b>Total</b>	<b>140,003,542</b>

Source: *Nigeria Factbook* (Kaduna: Risatu and Company, 2007).

2004 at 137 million. At an estimated 2.45 percent growth rate, the July 2005 estimate was 140.36 million, and the July 2006 estimate was 144 million. In 2005, the Nigerian ambassador to the United States, reflecting the views of President Obasanjo, estimated the population at 150 million, while the World Bank estimated it to be around 137 million.<sup>3</sup> In short, although there have been a wide range of population estimates, the prevailing data indicate between 140 and 150 million as of 2007. Much of the controversy inside Nigeria regarding census data has to do with balance of populations between the thirty-six states (see map 1).

Other basic statistics include these: in 2003, only 9 percent of Nigerian women used modern contraceptives, although 35 percent of women wanted to space or postpone pregnancies, according to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Also, in 2003 an estimated 5.8 percent of the population was HIV/AIDS positive, resulting in an estimated 310,000

3. Nigerian ambassador to the United States George Obiozor, in an interview with *Washington Diplomat* (August 2006, 15), said, Nigeria's "actual population is around 150 million, which would rank it number six after China, India, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil. Because of extremely high growth rates—its population exploded by 33 percent between 1990 and 2000—Nigeria is now ahead of Russia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan, and Mexico."

deaths. According to Nigerian media reports, this percentage may have come down slightly. In 2005, for example, the official figure was at 4.4 percent.

Nigeria has a large population with high rates of growth and a youth bulge approaching adulthood. The incidence of disease vectors in Nigeria, as elsewhere, puts an enormous burden on the country's healthy productive population. Health concerns are a major factor in the increase in Christian "health and wealth" churches, as well as in many of the local Muslim communities.

Regarding religious and ethnic identities, U.S. government and authoritative Nigerian estimates put the number of Muslims at 50 percent, Christians at 40 percent, and indigenous-belief followers at 10 percent.<sup>4</sup> In practice, as noted, it is widely recognized that the country is about half Muslim and half Christian, with pockets of traditional ethnic and local religions in both Muslim and Christian geocultural zones. Estimates of the number of ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria range between 250 and 400, depending on how dialects and subgroups are counted. Yet, three major ethnolinguistic clusters predominate: Hausa and Fulani (29 percent) in the north; Yoruba (21 percent) in the southwest; and Igbo (18 percent) in the southeast. Thus, these three identity groups constitute about 68 percent of the national population. In addition, there are a number of midsized ethnolinguistic groups: Ijaw (10 percent) in the south-south; Kanuri (4 percent) in the northeast; Ibibio (3.5 percent), also in the south-south; and Tiv (2.5 percent) in the Middle Belt. There are dozens (if not hundreds) of smaller groups, especially in the Middle Belt and south-south areas. English is the official national language, with Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo designated as national languages for certain purposes.

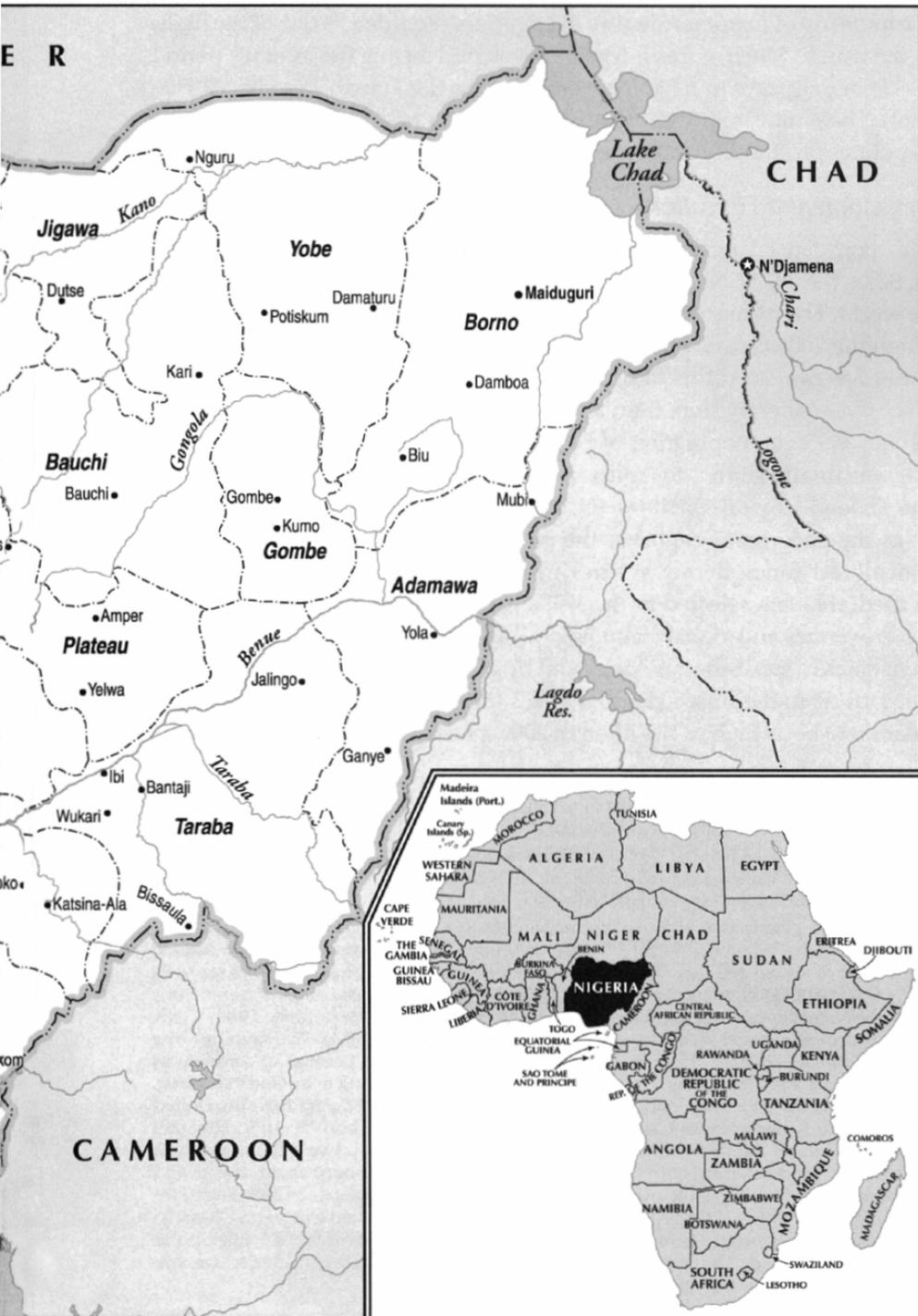
There are six semiofficial geocultural zones in Nigeria, three each in the northern and southern regions of the country. Muslim populations reside mainly in the north and southwest. In the north (including the northwest, north-central, and northeast), the emirate states were part of the nineteenth-century Sokoto caliphate (see map 2). The Borno environs (including Borno and Yobe) in the northeast have been Muslim since about the eleventh century. The Middle Belt (in the north-central zone) is a mixture of Christian and Muslim populations.

The Yoruba-speaking communities in the southwest are about half Muslim and half Christian. The south-south minority areas and the Igbo-speaking areas in the southeast are predominantly Christian. It is sometimes argued that the "north" is predominantly Muslim and the "south" predominantly

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4. See *Nigeria Factbook* (Kaduna: Risafu and Company, 2007), 7.





Christian, but this pattern is blurred by the mixed religious populations in the Middle Belt and southwest.<sup>5</sup>

The intensity of religious identity in Nigeria is regarded as one of the highest in the world.<sup>6</sup> Much of this intensity developed during the military period (1984–99) but appears to have increased during the Fourth Republic (1999–present). Thus, multireligious diversity in Nigeria now has a force that impacts politics profoundly and is very much in the international public eye.<sup>7</sup>

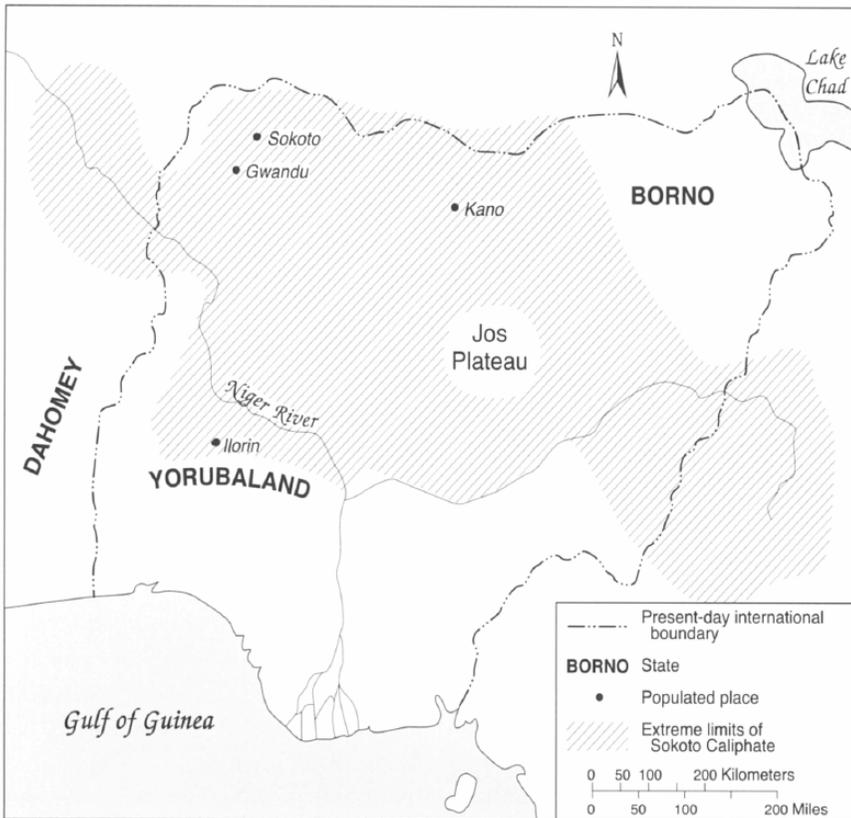
### ***Urbanization and Education***

The oil boom caused a major shift of populations from the countryside to the cities. Since the 1970s, Nigeria has had one of the highest urbanization rates in the world. The former capital in the southwest, Lagos, is a major port, and although the 2006 census puts the population there at around 9 million, the governor has protested this figure. Some observers maintain that the population of the greater metropolitan area is as high as 16 million! Between 1970 and about 1995, the population of Lagos doubled every ten years, until the capital was finally shifted to Abuja in the mid-1990s.

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) at Abuja was designed in the late 1970s as the geographic center of the country, that is, with equal access to all geocultural zones. Because of the high incidence of river blindness, now eradicated, the area selected in the 1970s was virtually uninhabited. Today, with oil revenues and global technologies, Abuja has become one of the most modern cities in sub-Saharan Africa and by 2006 had a population of 1.4 million, according to the 2006 census. The FCT minister, however, estimated the population to be as high as 7 million in 2006, perhaps reflecting the transient

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5. For details, see John N. Paden, *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).
  6. See BBC News, *World Edition*, February 26, 2004. Surveys by the BBC were done in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Nigeria, Russia, Mexico, and Lebanon and concluded, "Nigeria is the most religious country in the world." For a Nigerian perspective on this pattern, see Sabella Ogbobode Abidde, "The Destruction of Nigeria by Religious Means" ([www.gamji.com](http://www.gamji.com), accessed December 8, 2005). Abidde notes, "I have always felt that the destruction of Nigeria would come by way of one or a combination of the following cleavages: ethnic and religious conflicts, cataclysms with origin in the Niger Delta, or the combustion of pent-up anger within the military. Lately, however, a fourth dimension seems to be manifesting itself within the Nigerian fault line: the religionization of Nigeria." He goes on to say that "churches have become as 'common as fast-food joints' and that the born-again are everywhere, all claiming to be God's children, all claiming to be the chosen ones. There are more born-again in Nigeria than the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada combined. There are more born-again in Nigerian prisons than in all the prisons of the Western world combined. Active villains are born again; active prostitutes are born again; active armed-robbers are born again; cheats and vagabonds and everything and everybody in between are born again. . . . That's Nigerian-style religion for you. . . . Prior to the 2003 Nigerian elections, President Olusegun Obasanjo was asked whether he was going to contest the elections. His answer had a fantastic and fatalistic tone. He said, 'The decision will be made by God' and 'Whatever God decides, you can be assured that I will abide by him.'"
  7. "In God's Name," *Economist*, November 3, 2007, 3ff.

## MAP 2 SOKOTO CALIPHATE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



Source: Library of Congress.

nature of some inhabitants, who may have returned to their original states during the census. Other major cities with populations well over a million include metropolitan Kano (which the governor estimates as high as 12 million) and Kaduna in the north, Ibadan in the southwest, Onitsha and Nsukka in the southeast, and Port Harcourt in the south-south.

Regarding education, the national oil economy has made possible an extensive system of primary, secondary, and university education, including an increasing number of private universities, although there are regional variations.<sup>8</sup> According to Nigerian estimates, 68 percent of the population (age

8. See the editorial, "Application for More Private Universities," *Guardian* (Lagos), May 16, 2006, which reported on the current initiatives of forty-five individuals or groups interested in increasing the number of universities beyond the current seventy-four run by the federal government (26), the states (26), and the private sector (16). "Most of these universities are located south of the Niger (River), with a high concentration in the Southwest. Certainly this has implications for the future manpower production in the country." For discussion of a new northern university, Katsina State Islamic University, see "Katsina State Varsity'll Be Great Says Dantata," *Daily Triumph*, November 9, 2007.

15 and over) is literate, with rates of 75.7 percent for males and 60.6 percent for females (2003 estimate).<sup>9</sup> Adult education facilities are also widespread. However, funding for teachers, especially high-quality teachers, is always in short supply. Many educational facilities are in critical need of maintenance and repairs. About a million candidates took the national university entrance exam for the 2005–06 session, but the universities could only accommodate about two hundred thousand of them.<sup>10</sup> Private universities may take up part of the slack, but disappointed postsecondary students will have an impact on political and even religious movements.

The Nigerian estimate for secondary school attendance is 32 percent for males and 27 percent for females. At secondary and university levels, all instruction is in English. In addition, the predominantly Muslim areas, especially in the north, have parallel systems of Koranic schools and higher Islamic schools (Islamiyya), in which the language of learning is vernacular (for example, Hausa) and the subject matter is in Arabic. Islamiyya schools may try to blend Western and Islamic knowledge. The number of Islamic schools in a Muslim population center such as Kano may be as high as twenty thousand.

### ***Oil, Agriculture, and Industry***

Crude oil production accounts for 90–95 percent of Nigerian export revenues, over 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and 80 percent of government revenues. In June 2004 crude oil production averaged 2.14 million barrels per day. Deepwater exploration began in 2005 in the Gulf of Guinea, and Nigeria expects to produce 4.5 million barrels per day by 2010. Nigerian oil reserve estimates range from 25 billion to 35 billion barrels. In 2004–07, with the price of a barrel of oil moving from about \$40 per barrel to about \$98 per barrel, enormous windfall revenues have accrued to the Nigerian government, which had projected budgets based on an average of \$23 per barrel in 2004 to around \$32 per barrel in 2005 and \$40 per barrel in 2007. Nigerian officials estimated the surplus to be in the \$20-billion range for the first nine months of 2004 alone, and they have further increased since 2005. As noted previously, after Nigeria paid off its international debt in April 2006, it had about \$48 billion of its budget in its “excess crude account” of international reserves.<sup>11</sup>

9. *Nigeria Factbook*, 7.

10. *Guardian*, “Application for More Private Universities.”

11. See “Nigeria in Deal to Pay off Most of Its Foreign Debt,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2005. See also “Nigeria Pays off Its Big Debt. Sign of an Economic Rebound,” *New York Times*, April 22, 2006. Thus, “Nigeria reached a deal last October with the Paris Club, which includes the United States, Germany, France and other wealthy nations, that allowed it to pay off about \$30 billion in accumulated debt for about \$12 billion, an overall discount of about 60%.” For a Nigerian perspective, see “Excess Crude Earning Hits N1.4 Trillion,” *Guardian* (Lagos), September 6, 2005. As of 2007, the official exchange rate between the Nigerian naira and the U.S. dollar was N126 = US\$1.

Joint ventures account for 95 percent of Nigeria's crude oil production, and Shell Oil produces 50 percent of all oil. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has a 55 percent stake in Shell's operations and a 60 percent stake in ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco, ConocoPhillips, Eni S.p.A, and Total S.A. In 2003 the United States received 838,000 barrels of Nigerian oil per day, making Nigeria the fifth largest oil exporter to the U.S. and supplying about 8.7 percent of all U.S. imported oil. Almost all crude oil is produced in the south-south (Niger Delta) coastal zone of Nigeria. Subsequently, since 2003, about one-fifth of Nigerian oil has been taken off stream because of insurgency violence in the Delta.

Regarding agriculture and industry, the ecology of Nigeria includes two major zones: the savanna lands in the north and the rain forest zones in the south. In the north, grain crops such as millet and sorghum, plus root crops such as cassava, provide the backbone of the local economies. (The shortfall of rain in 2007 produced much local concern.) Peanuts ("groundnuts") used to be the main export crop from the north, but during the oil-economy era, this crop has been eclipsed. Cattle herding, plus sheep and goats, provide the main elements of animal husbandry. Hides and skins provide a significant export.

In the south, yams are a staple and there are cash crops such as cocoa, palm oil, rice, rubber, and timber. In general, large animals do not thrive in the south because of disease vectors (especially sleeping sickness), and there is a dependence on northern livestock production. Fishing provides a stable protein in many local coastal or river communities. Industries have developed in virtually every Nigerian urban area, often fueled by oil money. The construction industry has been especially active. However, cheap imports (both legal and smuggled), especially from China, have put many Nigerian light industries (including textiles) out of business.

### ***Income Distribution and Links to the Global Economy***

The U.S. estimate for Nigerian per capita income in 2002 was \$290. USAID estimates that 60–70 percent of Nigerians live on less than one dollar per day. While the estimated real growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) has been a healthy 7.1 percent, there has been an increasing gap between those who are linked to the national oil economy—including a wide range of government projects—and those who are living at local or subsistence levels. Government privatization programs, that is, the sale of previously state-owned assets, have tended to benefit those who have government or senior corporate connections.

Regarding links to the international economy, as of 2005 Nigerian external debt was around \$31 billion. The Nigerian government has negotiated debt relief, but in light of high oil prices and the extraordinary needs of non-energy-producing African countries, there has been little international receptiv-

ity to outright debt cancellation. Most debt was owed to the European-based Paris Club, with a very small portion to the United States. As noted, the Paris Club debt was renegotiated or written down in 2005, and by early 2006 the entire amount was paid off for the discounted sum of about \$12 billion.

After these Paris Club negotiations, the Nigerian government hoped to remain debt free by requiring all crude oil producers to refine 50 percent or more of all oil produced inside Nigeria by 2006. But this requirement did not move forward, and none of the oil majors is building refineries or seeking to purchase refineries that the government is trying to privatize.<sup>12</sup> Prior to the 2007 election, President Obasanjo sold two major refineries, one in Kaduna and one in Port Harcourt, to wealthy political supporters. (This was subsequently reversed after the election.)<sup>13</sup>

Nigeria's major export partners include the United States (38.3 percent), India (9.9 percent), Brazil (6.8 percent), Spain (6.2 percent), France (5.6 percent), and Japan (4 percent). Nigeria's major import partners include the United States (15.6 percent), the United Kingdom (9.6 percent), Germany (7.3 percent), China (7.2 percent), and Italy (4.3 percent). By 2005 the World Bank had approved more than \$8 billion in loans and International Development Agency credits. The U.S. government is the largest aid donor. Nigeria is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and, until spring 2006, served as chair of the African Union.

### ***National and Military Politics***

Nigeria returned to civilian rule in May 1999 after fifteen years of military rule. The 1999 constitution is based on a presidential rather than a parliamentary system. The president is elected for four-year terms, with a limit of two terms.<sup>14</sup> The first election was in February 1999, the second in April 2003, and the third in April 2007.

The legislative branch consists of a 107-seat Senate (with three from each of the thirty-six states, plus representation from the FCT at Abuja). The House of Representatives has 346 members, with distribution based on state and local populations. (The 2006 census came too late to affect redistribution of House seats.) Members in both the Senate and the House have four-year terms.

12. For background on U.S. perspectives on Nigerian oil, see David L. Goldwyn and J. Stephen Morrison, *Promoting Transparency in the African Oil Sector: Recommendations for U.S. Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2004).

13. This privatization of oil refineries was one of the grievances in the national strike by the National Labour Congress (NLC) in June 2007.

14. Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999* (Lagos: Federal Government Press, 1999).

The dominant political party is the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which in 2003 reportedly won about 62 percent of the presidential votes, although these figures were contested in the courts. (On July 1, 2005, the Supreme Court finally confirmed the national- and state-level figures.) In April 2007 the PDP was declared the winner in the presidential race with 72 percent of the vote, although most observers contest these figures (see chapter 4 for more detail). Based mainly in the north, the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) has been the major opposition party, which, along with about twenty-plus minor parties, has formed the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP). In spring 2006, thirty-five political parties had been registered by the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), with additional parties emerging or realigning during the summer of 2006. By spring 2007, there were fifty registered parties, with about twenty-five contesting the presidency.

The importance of state and local politics cannot be overstated. Nigeria is a three-tier federation, with national, state, and local government responsibilities spelled out in the constitution. There are thirty-six states and 774 local government authorities, with legislative assemblies and councils respectively. Much of the funding for state and local government comes from block grant disbursements from the federal government based on national oil revenues. A complex constitutional provision designates how much each state receives from the federal distributive pool, depending on population, developmental level, crude-oil-producing capacity, and so on. In the 2003 elections the PDP captured twenty-eight governorships and the ANPP seven governorships (in the far north). The Alliance for Democracy (AD) captured the governorship of Lagos. In the 2007 election, the PDP claimed twenty-nine governorships, although at least fifteen of these have been contested in the election tribunal courts. Notably, the two major centers of opposition political parties are in Kano (All Nigeria People's Party) and Lagos (Action Congress), the two largest states in Nigeria.

Historically, much of Nigerian politics has revolved around the military. Nigeria became independent from Britain in 1960 and during the First Republic (1960–66) followed a Westminster parliamentary system. This system broke down in 1966 when junior officers attempted a coup and assassinated key northern regional and national leaders. The turmoil that followed led to the civil war (1967–70) in which the parts of the southeast zone (then known as Biafra) tried to break away. Between 1966 and 1979 a series of military regimes ruled. In 1979 there was a return to civilian rule under a Second Republic constitution, which was presidential in nature. In December 1983 the military again stepped in and established a series of regimes into early 1999, when the current Fourth Republic was inaugurated. (The so-called Third Republic was stillborn in 1993, when the elections of June 12 were annulled.)

Between December 1983 and May 1999, senior officers maintained consistently that they were trying to keep the country together, crack down on corruption, and serve as a transition to a workable system of democratic federalism. Critics of the military contend that they abused human rights, were equally corrupt, and delayed the development of democratic practices and civic cultures. Until 1999 many of the senior officers were from the north, although there has been a policy of recruiting officer candidates from each of the thirty-six states. Since 1999 and the transition to civilian rule, many of the former senior (northern) officers have retired, thus contributing to a sense of marginalization in the north.

The role of the police is also significant since all police are “federal,” according to the 1999 constitution. How effective such police are in combating crime is very much a matter of political debate.<sup>15</sup> With more than 320,000 members, the police are by far the largest security agency in the country.

This brief profile of demographic, economic, and political characteristics provides the background for assessing Nigeria’s influence and significance as a pivotal state within the larger African, Muslim, and global contexts. Clearly, there are serious sociopolitical challenges within Nigeria, and political leadership may well determine whether the country tips one way or the other on its pathway to the future. Issues regarding the ethnoreligious balance and the growing gap between rich and poor are at the heart of these challenges.

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15. See Prince Charles Dickson, “The Nigeria Police: Going Nowhere Quickly,” Jos, Plateau, Nigeria ([www.gamji.com](http://www.gamji.com), accessed November 12, 2005), in which he decries the poor state of the police force, including its inability to combat crime despite attracting large numbers of recruits since 1999.