
Nigeria

Comparative National Systems

Introduction

Located in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea between Benin and Cameroon, Nigeria is one of the largest and most politically and culturally complex nations in Africa. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, its largest oil producer and its second largest economy. Despite a return to civilian government in 1999 after a long period of military dominance, Nigeria remains a fractious nation, divided along ethnic and religious lines.

This report considers the comparative political landscape of Nigeria using the SPECIPIO framework for comparative political analysis. SPECIPIO stands for stateness, political regime, economic development, culture and history, institutions, party families, international influences and ownership. Each of these categories will be addressed individually in order to better comprehend Nigeria's political system.

The stateness section considers to the degree to which Nigeria is a state and whether it is a failed state. The second section on political regime argues that Nigeria should be categorized as a competitive authoritarian regime. A discussion of the important factors in Nigeria's economic development follows with an emphasis on the

country's immense oil resources. Nigeria's culture and history are then analyzed in order to gain insight into the current regime and its future prospects. The next two sections dissect the inner-workings of Nigeria's political, electoral and party systems. The role of international influences on Nigeria's politics is then addressed followed by a discussion on ownership in Nigeria. The report finishes with some conclusions.

For the most part, this paper will focus on the current civilian-led regime in Nigeria, referred to as the "Fourth Republic," which began in 1999. While Nigeria's checkered and complex history has been crucial in shaping the nation, historical events will be addressed only as they relate to present Nigerian politics. The goal of this paper is to describe and help elucidate the factors that shape Nigeria's politics.

The main theme of the paper is that while the current Nigerian regime is a pseudo-democracy and is in danger of becoming a failed state, it is still relatively new and faces many of the problems of young African governments. Single-party government, institutional inefficiency, corruption, ethnic unrest and a massively flawed electoral system are all associated with the Nigerian government and are cause for serious concern. But it is important to recognize the intrinsic challenges the government must contend with, such as a vast geographical area, a highly culturally and ethnically diverse population and the management of enormous oil reserves.

Stateness

There is some question whether Nigeria is a state at all. Foreign Policy's 2009 Failed State Index categorizes Nigeria as "in danger" of becoming a failed state and lists it as the 15th worst state in the world, sandwiched between Burma and North Korea.ⁱ This troubling indicator seriously brings into question the level of stateness in Nigeria.

Before analyzing the extent of Nigeria's stateness, a definition of a "state" is necessary. Max Weber defined a state as a set of coherent, effective and strong organizations that claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a defined territory.ⁱⁱ Therefore, in determining Nigeria's stateness, this section will consider 1) Nigeria's territorial control; 2) its monopoly on the legitimate use of force; and 3) the coherency, effectiveness and strength of its organizations.

Territorial Control

Nigeria is a very large country. It is the 8th most populous nation in the world and the 32nd largest geographically. Furthermore, the Nigerian population includes over 250 ethnicities.ⁱⁱⁱ This combination of a large territory with a huge and ethnically varied population immediately poses a substantial challenge for control of this entire territory. The two regions that of most concern in analyzing Nigeria's territorial control are northern Nigeria and the Niger Delta.

An important moment in Nigeria's history occurred in 1914 when the current geographical boundaries were set by the British. The new boundaries united the mostly

Muslim Northern Nigerian Protectorate with the mainly Christian Southern Nigerian Protectorate to form the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, whose boundaries hold today. In addition to uniting two distinct protectorates, the new Nigerian protectorate joined a great many diverse ethnicities and regions into an artificial political entity. This joining of disparate peoples and cultures has led to one of the major stateness problems Nigeria experiences today: control over the regions of northern Nigeria.

Areas of northern Nigeria exerted a degree of independence in 1999 when 12 states in the northern region of Nigeria established the sharia code (Islamic law) as the principal criminal law despite the fact that the Nigerian constitution provides for separation of religion and state. These courts co-exist with the Nigerian magistrate courts system and operate independent of federal law.^{iv} In 2006, after a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed was published in a Danish newspaper, anti-Christian riots broke out over northern Nigeria, resulting in over 100 deaths. That is only one of many instances of religious violence in northern Nigeria in recent years. Both the lack of basic legal control in northern Nigeria and the inability to prevent religious violence militate against Nigeria being categorized as a state.

Monopoly of the Use of Legitimate Force

Lack of monopoly over the use of force in the Niger Delta seriously brings into question Nigeria's stateness. Since 2004 in the Niger Delta, violent rebel groups focused on attacking the oil industry have acted with impunity in securing oil resources by terrorizing oil companies and local governments.^v The militant groups operate in the

mangrove swamps of the delta and have persisted in spite of the Nigerian government's attempts to eliminate them. Although there is some recent hope that the Delta rebellion may soon come to a close,^{vi} it is difficult to argue that Nigeria has a monopoly on the use of force as long until the militants continue to operate uncontrolled by the Nigerian government.

Coherency, Effectiveness and Strength of Organizations

Nigeria has strong administrative capabilities governed by a three tiered federal, state and local government system. However, the effectiveness, coherency and strength of the government are deeply impeded by corruption to the point when it is questionable whether Nigerian institutions are capable of providing for the welfare of Nigerian citizens. Transparency International ranks Nigeria as the most corrupt nation in Africa and wrote in its 2004 Nigeria country report that "corruption in Nigeria is endemic and pervades every facet of life, as well as every strata of society.... The situation has contributed substantially to the present situation in the country of under development and poverty; the gross violation of rights; the dearth of human dignity; the absence of the full realisation of national and individual potential; and the negation of social justice."^{vii} In light of the scope and pervasiveness of corruption in Nigeria's government and organizations, it is hard to categorize Nigeria as fitting within Weber's framework of a state.

Conclusion

Nigeria's ranking on the Failed States Index and the issues raised above certainly bring into question whether Nigeria can justifiably be considered a state. Despite questions as to the scope of influence of the Nigerian state over all of its territory, the Nigerian state is still considered legitimate by almost all of its citizens.^{viii} In consideration of the size and population of the country, the Nigerian government functions relatively smoothly in comparison to other large African nations like the Democratic Republic of Congo or Sudan. Ultimately, Nigeria seems best classified as a borderline state that is in danger of becoming a failed state.

Political Regime

After a 60 year period of British colonial control, the Federal Republic of Nigeria came into being on October 1, 1960 when Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom. Although the first post-independence parliamentary elections occurred in December 1964, the country's leaders over the next several decades have been mostly determined by military coup, not by multiparty election. Since 1960, Nigeria has been under 3 civilian administrations and 7 military. The first civilian-to-civilian transfer of power did not occur until 2007.^{ix}

Nigeria's transition to a civilian-led government began in June 1998, when then military dictator Sani Abacha died. His military successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar initiated the transition by releasing political prisoners, including former president Olusegun Obasanjo, and called for legislative elections in December 1998 and

presidential elections for the following January. This brought to an end 16 years of military rule in Nigeria.

In terms of Samuel Huntington's political transition framework put forth in The Third Wave, Nigeria's transition was transformative.^x Nigeria fits this categorization because it involved a "top-down" transition in which a well-established military regime cedes power to a civilian led-government. However, the new leader following the presidential elections was Obasanjo, himself a former general.

Although Nigeria has held elections since 1999, it cannot be considered a democracy under the minimal definition of democracy put forth in class as "a system of government in which the leaders are elected in periodic, free and fair elections, which implies a group of rights associated with the government."^{xi} The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index listed Nigeria is an authoritarian regime.^{xii} However, Nigeria is best classified as a competitive authoritarian or a pseudo-democracy because there are some areas of contestation.

Levitsky and Way put forth four areas of contestation in pseudo-democracies: electoral, media, judicial and legislature.^{xiii} Whether Nigeria's elections are free and fair (and by almost all accounts they are not), opposition parties do contest for and win seats in the legislature and can contest the presidency. Media outlets are government controlled but active. The judiciary, considered an independent branch under Nigeria's constitution, is independent but marred by bribes and political favors.^{xiv} Thus, there is some level of pluralism that would not be found in a strictly authoritarian government.

Another important question to ask in determining whether Nigeria is a democracy is who in fact chose the presidential successor to Olusegun Obasanjo. The presidential election of 2007 was widely condemned by the international community for ballot stuffing, voter intimidation and coercion, and massive fraud.^{xv} The fact that the new President Umaru Yar'Adua comes from the same People's Democratic Party (PDP) as Obasanjo is certainly an indication that the PDP was behind the election fraud and ultimately controlled the succession. Ruling party control of succession also indicates a competitive authoritarian regime.

International indicators also categorize Nigeria as below the democracy category. Freedom House listed Nigeria as “partly free” due to “the ruling party’s increasing consolidation of power and marginalization of the opposition, as evidenced by the Supreme Court’s rejection in December of opposition challenges to the results of the deeply flawed 2007 presidential election.”^{xvi} When an election is as flawed and widely condemned as the 2007 election, it would be difficult for any observer to label Nigeria a democracy. In conclusion, because Nigeria is ruled by a single-party, but allows limited pluralism, and a partly free population, it is best classified as a competitive authoritarian regime.

Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was close to \$2,000 per person in 2008. However, despite this above average GDP per capita for a developing African nation, much of the Nigerian population suffers from extreme poverty. Nigeria is ranked 158th on the United Nations' Human Poverty Index and over 50% of the population living below \$1 per day.^{xvii} The disparity between GDP per capita and the number of people living below \$1 per day illustrates the enormous income gap in Nigeria.

Nigeria's economic development has been particularly poor considering the enormous oil revenues it has enjoyed over the last generation. Although Nigeria is one of the top 10 oil producers in the world, most of the revenues have gone to the coffers of the ruling elite and not to the economic development of the people of Nigeria. In fact, the World Bank estimates that 80% of Nigerian oil revenues benefit less than 1% of the population.^{xviii} This shocking and disheartening statistic points to the gravity of the corruption problem in Nigeria.

However, this result would come as know surprise to writers like Michael Ross, author of the article, *Does Oil Hinder Democracy*.^{xix} Ross' thesis that resource wealth can have negative effects on the development of democracy seems very applicable to Nigeria. Of particular interest in Nigeria is the group formation effect by which the lack of an independent bourgeois impedes formation of social capital necessary to further democracy. The idea is that resource-led growth increases the income-gap and prevents modernization from reaching the lower classes. In Nigeria, the lower, often rural, classes do not receive the educational benefits of development because the revenues go to the

entrenched ruling elite. Ross argues that without education, people are less likely to stand-up for their democratic rights.

Nigeria's immense oil wealth ultimately serves the needs of the ruling People's Democratic Party by providing the financial incentives and resources to do whatever is necessary to remain in power. The presence of oil also keeps the government under constant threat of military coups and insurgencies, which in turn leads to a more repressive regime. Nigeria seems to be a prime example of the "resource curse" in effect.

Culture and History

In 1914, British High Commissioner Fredrick Lugard united what were then two separate protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria into one protectorate. In the process, he united two regions that were culturally and historically different. This decision has led to Nigeria's current modern-day challenges of running a coherent state.

The primary and most-readily recognizable difference between the north and south of Nigeria is religion. In Nigeria as a whole, 50% of the population is Muslim while 40% is Christian (the remaining 10% is considered animist).^{xx} Islam in northern Nigeria has its roots in the 16th century and it is still the prominent religion in the northern and south-west regions. Religious conflict has resulted in sporadic deadly violence in the northern region that persists today.

Nigerian culture is also extremely ethnically diverse. There are over 250 ethnicities throughout the country, each with a unique cultural history. The most

significant ethnic groups are the Hausa (29%), Yoruba (21%), Igbo (18%) and Ijaw (10%).^{xxi} Nigeria is somewhat unique in Africa is that there is no dominant ethnicity. However, the lack of dominant ethnicities has led to struggles for political control. Rivalries among ethnic groups have been a source of instability in Nigeria. This cultural variation may be one of the reasons Nigeria has found it so difficult to democratize.

In a broader cultural sense, Nigeria is very much a traditional country in which religion plays an important role in Nigerian identity and politics. The Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map and World Values Survey places Nigeria among the more traditional societies in the world.^{xxii} This survey helps clarify the lack of development in Nigeria. Inglehart and Welzel argue that the more traditional a society is, the more deference to power that society will show. In Nigeria's case, one may wonder why more rebellions have not occurred despite decades of corruption and graft from its leaders. Part of this answer is surely the fear a military dictatorship inspires, but it also may be due Nigeria's strong traditional values and deference to authority

A further way of interpreting the Inglehart-Welzel survey is that the 50% of the population still living on less than US\$1 per day remain pre-occupied with survival rather than self-expression. Nigeria is positioned below average on the self-expression survival rating which places it behind many developed nations but ahead of many African counties. As such these Nigerian are less concerned with the short-comings of its politicians and more focused on day-to-day survival.

Another cultural issue in Nigeria is that the prevalence of military coups and disintegrated republics has led to what Przeworski refers to as “political learning.”^{xxiii} This idea is that if a nation has experience with democratic governments being overthrown, then the current and future democracies are less likely to endure because relevant actors in the nations understand how to take power. Since independence Nigeria has seen three civilian-led, democratically elected governments overthrown by military coup. Consequently, Nigeria’s political history casts tremendous doubt over how long the current Fourth Republic may endure. Nigeria’s checkered history of overthrown republics and military coups, combined with an already weak institutional framework make this event seem plausible.

Institutions

Following 16 years of military rule, Nigeria became a federal republic with a presidential system in 1999. This republic was developed as a multiparty democratic system and began with elections and the adoption of a new constitution based on the United States’ constitution. Nigeria also adopted a checks and balances system similar to the U.S. with three branches of government, the Executive, Legislature and Judicial branches.^{xxiv}

Nigeria’s electoral system and elections for president are majoritarian. Both the National Assembly and the presidential elections follow the first-past the post electoral system whereby a plurality of the votes ensures victory. The National Assembly is Nigeria’s bicameral legislature and includes a Senate and a House of Representatives.

The 109 seat Senate includes 3 senators from each of the 36 states plus one senator to represent to solely the capital city, Abuja. The 360 seat House of Representatives distributes its seats according to population so that different states receive different numbers of representatives based on the population of that state. Each state has between 24 and 40 representatives. Nigeria's single-party cabinet is called the Federal Executive Council and includes representatives from all 36 states. It is a minimal winning, one-party cabinet chosen by the president. Members of the Nigerian Supreme Court are appointed by the president subject to confirmation by the Senate.

Nigeria's institutional system ensures that the ruling party controls all aspects of politics. The only institution in which minority parties have a say is the National Assembly. Furthermore, the first-past-the-post system ensures that not all of the 250 ethnicities are represented. Nigeria has employed the first-past-the-post electoral system since independence. While this has produced clear winners, it does not reflect the diverse nature of the country. By failing to relate a party's share of the votes to the legislature, Nigeria's electoral system does not provide full representation to a diverse population.^{xxv}

Party Families

Nigeria has a weak party system with a single-ruling party controlling most of the government since democratization in 1999. The dominant political party in Nigeria is

the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP was started in 1998 by Olesugan Obasanjo, who won the 1999 and 2003 presidential elections with the PDP. The character of the PDP is centrist with a neoliberal stance on economic policies and a conservative leaning on social issues.^{xxvi} The precise ideology of the PCP is difficult to define since most of its policies are populist, aimed at gaining support in all of Nigeria's diverse regions.

In the 2007 elections, the PDP presidential candidate was chosen by PDP party delegates. Umaru Yar'Adua easily secured the nomination and eventually won the presidency with nearly 70% of the vote. In legislative elections, the PDP won 223 of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives and 76 of the 109 seats in the Senate.

The dominance of the PDP over the past decade is due in large part to the legacy of former-president Obasanjo. He gained widespread popularity in 1979 when he transitioned the Nigeria government from a military dictatorship to civilian rule. He later used this popularity to easily win two elections on the backs of the PDP. Despite his major platform during the 1999 and 2003 elections to fight corruption; however it is unclear how much the PDP has actually succeeded in this regard.

Aside from the PDP, party families are not well-defined. This is due partly because political parties have been legal in Nigeria for only 10 years. While the PDP has been able to dominate Nigerian politics for 10 years, the departure of Obasanjo and marred 2007 elections may increase the strength of Nigeria's opposition parties. However, as long as the PDP retain power, there is good reason to believe it will

continue to use the means of office and the huge financial oil resources available to win future elections. Some of the legitimacy of the PDP has been reduced lately due to the controversial nature of its 2007 election victory, especially after then vice-president Atiku Abubakar was controversially declared ineligible to run.^{xxvii}

In the 2007 elections, more than 18 parties participated in the presidential election, but only 3 received more than 2% of the vote. In the legislative elections, over 50 political parties participated, with 6 parties winning 137 seats in the legislature and 3 parties winning 33 seats in the senate. Despite the relatively small number of opposition parties represented in the legislature, it is enough to ensure that the National Assembly does not act as a rubber stamp for the president. This was made clear in 2006 when then-president Obasanjo tried to pass a constitutional amendment to run for a third-term. The amendment was defeated in the National Assembly which ultimately led to Obasanjo stepping down for the 2007 elections.

The main opposition party and arguably the only other relevant party, is the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) led by former military general Muhammadu Buharu. The ANPP also has its roots in the democratic period of the late 1980's. However, while the PDP's centrist policies attempt to reflect the opinions of all of Nigeria, the ANPP's policy framework is focused on representing the needs of the northern Muslim regions. Other parties include the ANP, a conservative party with a strong following in the Muslim north of Nigeria, the Action Congress, a classical liberal party that receives most of its

votes in the metropolitan Lagos area and the Labour Party, Nigeria's most prominent socialist party.

International Influences

The main international influences in Nigeria are multi-lateral organizations, regional bodies and foreign powers. It is difficult to gauge the extent of influence each has in Nigeria, especially since the arrival of President Yar'Adua. Former President Obasanjo was much more active in international affairs, especially in regards to conflicts in Africa and relations with the United States. While President Yar'Adua has to this day mostly focused his policies and influence on domestic affairs, that could change.

Nigeria's economic development has been strongly linked to outside actors, particularly multi-lateral economic assistance and debt relief organizations including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), African Development Bank and the Paris and London Clubs of lenders. As of August 2007, the World Bank was assisting Nigeria in 23 projects with a total commitment value of about \$2.67 billion.^{xxviii} Another important economic international influence in Nigeria are the creditors to external debt, which stood at US\$37.5 billion in 2005. The London and Paris Clubs of international creditors recently forgave all of the debt when Nigeria agreed to pay US\$12.4 billion to the Paris Club and US\$2.15 billion to the London club. This was considered by many to be a positive step in allowing the Nigeria government to invest in its country instead of paying back debts.^{xxix}

Nigeria is a major influence in regional politics, both in West Africa and the broader continent. Nigeria is a key member in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union. Nigeria has both the largest economy and military in ECOWAS and was a founding member. The ECOWAS parliament is also located in Abuja. As part of both ECOWAS and AU forces, Nigeria has committed many peacekeeping troops throughout West Africa, particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone and other conflict zones such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. Former President Obasanjo personally mediated several conflicts and disputes throughout Africa.

Nigeria's oil wealth attracts many international influences to its politics. China, the U.S. and the European Union have a huge incentive in stabilizing the Nigeria to ensure that oil continues to flow unabated. Nigeria is the 5th biggest provider of oil to the U.S. and also provides important quantities of oil to the E.U. and will be providing more to China. The state-run Chinese oil company CNOOC and Nigeria are currently in negotiations for CNOOC to secure a sixth of Nigeria's oil resources for between US\$30-50 billion. This massive deal will upset many currently contracts between Nigeria and western oil companies. It is unclear what sort of influence the U.S., China and the E.U. will have in Nigeria in the future, but those countries have a large incentive in keeping Nigeria politically stable.

There is also a reasonable amount of domestic and international human rights advocacy in Nigeria. There has also been a recent increase in civic interest groups. These

organizations do not have a great deal of influence within the Nigerian government, but they do play an important watchdog role and sometimes act as a liaison between Nigerian and the international human rights community.

Ownership

A ruling elite and government officials, particularly those with power in oil producing regions, have firm control over the major assets in Nigeria.^{xxx} Government officials benefiting from their positions have one main objective: stay in power. Military generals were the primary beneficiaries of the oil wealth before 1999. Wealthy and powerful individuals who have taken power during the Fourth Republic took this control away from the military generals that controlled Nigeria's resources before 1999. There was no compromise in this transition. Consequently, Nigeria faces the real possibility of a military coup similar to those which ended the previous three Nigerian republics.

The majority of Nigerian are kept outside of the elitist battle for Nigeria's immense wealth. However, in 2005, over 60% of Nigerian were subsistence farmers. While a middle class exists in larger metropolitan areas like Lagos, Kano and Ibadan, most Nigerians live on less than US\$1 per day. Outside of a few wealthy businessmen, government officials and high ranking military personal, there are few noticeable class coalitions: people are either very wealthy or they are very poor.

The wealth disparity in Nigeria has been a major calling point of the Niger Delta rebellion. The insurgents often claim that their motive for fighting is that oil revenues

from the Delta region are not distributed to the people of the region. Furthermore, these groups claim that people of the Niger Delta should be financially compensated for the degradation of their environment caused by oil drilling. The Nigerian government has responded to this rhetoric by pushing a bill through the National Assembly, as part of the deal to end the rebellion in the Delta, that would distribute more wealth among the villages of the Delta.^{xxxii}

Conclusions

Nigeria has faced many of the same challenges as other African states: ethnic diversity, endemic corruption, military coups, rigged elections and weak institutions. While it may be easy to condemn the competitive authoritarian political regime in Nigeria, it is commonplace in Africa: over half of African nations are listed as such.^{xxxiii} Nigeria's political system also faces serious problems regarding its stateness, institutional efficiency, internal security and economic and social development. Nigeria's modest progress from military dictatorship to competitive authoritarianism has resulted in many deficiencies and the road to democratization is threatened. The key factors in the success of future democratization will be how Nigeria handles its natural resources and whether it can unify its multitude of ethnicities and its north-south regional divide under one system of government. As long as oil continues to flow in Nigeria, there will remain enormous financial incentives for the People's Democratic Party do whatever is necessary to stay in power.

However, it is important to remember that the current Nigerian government and constitution only began in 1999 and followed a long and brutal history of military dictatorships. Even with the flaws of the current republic, the 10 years it has stayed in power is the longest for any Nigerian government since independence. That there were elections at all is a step forward from military coups.

There are some signs of progress for the Nigerian government. Negotiations in the Niger Delta recently took a step forward in ending the rebellion when the Nigerian government offered amnesty to the insurgents in return for disarmament.^{xxxiii} The recent cancelling of external debt by the Paris and London clubs may also provide extra finances for the government to spend on the nation's infrastructure and human capital. Lastly, as modernization continues to come to Nigeria, democracy has a stronger likelihood of being sustained. Nigeria may be nowhere close to the \$6500 GDP per capita "unbreakable" mark, but as it modernizes, Nigerians may become less likely to accept a corrupt and authoritarian regime.

ⁱ Foreign Policy Failed States Index 2009 - http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings

ⁱⁱ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Free Press), pp. 324-85.

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- xxx The two key witnesses in the Siro-Wawa trial later admitted they were bribed and had lied about their testimony.

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