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Nigeria (2006)

Polity:

No polity available

Political Rights:

4

Civil Liberties:

4

Status:

Partly Free

Population:

13,150,000

GNI/Capita:

\$350

Life Expectancy:

44

Religious Groups:

Muslim (50 percent), Christian (40 percent), indigenous beliefs (10 percent)

Ethnic Groups:

Hausa and Fulani (29 percent), Yoruba (21 percent), Ibo (18 percent), other (32 percent)

Capital:

Abuja

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Overview

A national conference held in 2005 aimed at drafting changes to Nigeria's constitution ended without agreement on the most fundamental challenges facing the country, including how to share the nation's oil wealth. The government of President Olusegun Obasanjo continued its efforts to reform the economy and fight corruption, winning debt relief from international creditors. Meanwhile, the government cracked down harder on those it considered a threat to national unity.

The military has ruled Nigeria for all but 15 years since independence from Britain in 1960. Generals and their backers argued that they were the only ones who could keep a lid on simmering tensions among the country's 250 ethnic groups, as well as between religious communities; the north is largely Muslim, while the south is mainly Christian.

Nigeria initially appeared to be emerging from several years of military rule under General Ibrahim Babangida in 1993, when presidential elections were held. Moshood Abiola, a Muslim Yoruba from the south, was widely considered the winner, but the military annulled the results. It continued to rule behind a puppet civilian administration until General Sani Abacha, a principal architect of previous coups, took power in November 1993. A predominantly military Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) was appointed, and all democratic structures were dissolved and political parties banned. Abiola was arrested in June 1994 after declaring himself Nigeria's rightful president. He died in detention, after suffering from a lack of proper medical care, just five weeks after Abacha himself died suddenly in June 1998.

The departure of the two most significant figures on Nigeria's political landscape opened possibilities for democratic change. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the army chief of staff, emerged as the PRC's consensus choice to be the country's next leader, and he promised to oversee a transition to civilian rule in 1999. However, Olusegun Obasanjo—a former general who had led a military regime in Nigeria from 1976 to 1979 and had spent three years in prison under Abacha—won the presidential poll in February. In legislative elections held that year, Obasanjo's People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the most seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

Nigeria made its first peaceful transition from one democratically elected government to another with the April 2003 election, when Obasanjo was

reelected for a second term. Anticipated widespread unrest during the elections did not materialize, although there was violence leading up to the polls, which were marred by irregularities. While Obasanjo faced 19 opposition candidates, the race ultimately was between the southern Christian Obasanjo and former general Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim and member of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). Obasanjo won the presidency with 62 percent of the vote compared with 32 percent for Buhari, who filed a petition on behalf of some 20 opposition parties to nullify the election results. The Supreme Court in 2005 unanimously rejected the challenge, saying the fraud discovered was not enough to have changed the poll results.

Obasanjo's PDP also dominated the 2003 legislative elections, in which at least 30 parties participated. Obasanjo's PDP won 52 of 109 Senate seats and 170 of 360 House seats. The ANPP captured 25 seats in the Senate and 81 in the House, while the Alliance for Democracy won 5 Senate seats and 30 House seats. Smaller parties secured the remainder of seats.

After initially resisting calls for a national dialogue, Obasanjo opened a national conference in 2005 by warning delegates against questioning Nigeria's unity. Although Nigerians had long called for a national conference, the talks drew criticism from Obasanjo's opponents and members of civil society. They complained that delegates were appointed by Obasanjo or nominated by Nigeria's 36 state governors- 28 of whom belong to the ruling party-and therefore lacked credibility. About 400 delegates met for five months and failed to agree on fundamental issues such as how to divide the country's oil wealth and how to effectively deal with religious and ethnic tensions. The delegates called for a special commission to devise possible solutions to those problems. The National Assembly will consider recommendations from the conference for possible constitutional changes.

The government in 2005 cracked down harder on those it considered a threat to national unity or who might disrupt the country's oil output. Demonstrations and rallies held by the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) were broken up by security forces, and scores of people were detained, according to human rights groups. In October, authorities arrested a separatist ethnic militia leader in the volatile Niger Delta region and charged him with treason. Moujahid Dokubo-Asari, leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, was detained after he allegedly called for the breakup of Nigeria in a newspaper interview.

Serious human rights violations remained a problem in Nigeria during the year. In a rare public admission of guilt, the government in August admitted that there had been widespread extrajudicial killings of suspects and innocent citizens by the country's police. The comments came after New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that torture and killing of suspects by police was rampant in Nigeria and largely went unpunished. Obasanjo promised tough action to clean up the police force.

The Obasanjo government in 2005 continued its economic reform efforts and won praise from international creditors for attempts to fight corruption. In

2005, the International Monetary Fund said that for the first time in decades Nigeria's non-oil sectors were growing significantly faster than the oil sectors and that this had reestablished confidence in the country as a foreign investment location. The Paris Club of creditor nations announced that it was impressed by Nigeria's economic reform program and wrote off \$18 billion in debt; Nigeria has a \$30 billion foreign debt.

Officials in September said they had recovered nearly \$460 million found in Swiss bank accounts linked to former president Abacha. Money linked to Abacha has been found in other countries as well.

The majority of Nigerians are engaged in small-scale agriculture, while most wealth is controlled by a small elite. The agriculture and manufacturing sectors deteriorated considerably in the pursuit of oil, which accounts for more than 98 percent of the country's export revenues and almost all foreign investment.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of Nigeria can change their government democratically. The president is elected by popular vote for no more than two four-year terms. Members of the bicameral National Assembly are elected for four-year terms to the 109-seat Senate and the 360-seat House of Representatives. Local and international observers noted irregularities during the 2003 presidential and legislative elections, including ballot-box stuffing, multiple voting, alteration of results, and voter intimidation. Observers said fraud and intimidation were particularly prevalent in the southeast of the country and in the Niger Delta.

Major political parties include the ruling PDP, the ANPP, the National Democratic party, the Alliance for Democracy, and the People's Redemption Party. Major political parties include the ruling PDP, the ANPP, the National Democratic Party, the Alliance for Democracy, and the People's Redemption Party.

Corruption and impunity remain problems, with corruption having bled Nigeria of billions of dollars in oil revenue. The government has taken steps to improve transparency and reduce corruption, including reforming procedures for contract procurements and bidding, and several high-profile cases emerged in 2005. Former Senate president Adolphus Wabara was sacked and charged with corruption, and Education Minister Fabian Osuji was fired for allegedly bribing Wabara and six other lawmakers to smooth passage of his annual budget. After discovering that top officials were to have been among the beneficiaries, Obasanjo fired his housing minister for allegedly trying to sell off more than 200 government houses at cut-rate prices. Police Chief Tafawa Balogun suddenly resigned as inspector general of police in January and was later arrested and charged with graft and money laundering. Nevertheless, government critics note that no top official has actually been convicted and jailed for corruption since Obasanjo was elected president. The Senate in June 2005 refused to ban the acceptance of "gifts" in its new code of ethics; senators said that bribery was already illegal and accepting gifts was part of Nigerian culture. Nigeria was ranked 152 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of speech and expression is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. More than 200 private radio and television stations broadcast throughout the country, and scores of print publications operate largely unhindered. However, criminal defamation laws continue to be used against journalists. Sharia (Islamic law) in 12 northern states imposes severe penalties for alleged press offenses. Local authorities regularly target journalists who criticize them, and the media in northern Nigeria are most at risk. The government does not impede internet access.

A newspaper publisher, Owei Kobina Sikpi, was arrested in October after his publication, the Weekly Star, carried an article alleging a state governor was involved in money laundering. Sikpi was held secretly for nearly a week and then charged with seven counts of false information. Members of the State Security Service (SSS) in August raided the offices of the Lagos-based weekly The Exclusive and confiscated more than 200 copies of the tabloid. Authorities apparently wanted to censor coverage of ethnic Igbo nationalist groups. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists has documented a pattern of SSS suppression of publications reporting on the proseparatist group MASSOB.

Religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution, but many Nigerians, including government officials, often discriminate against those of a religion different from their own. Religious violence, often reflecting regional and ethnic differences and accompanying competition for resources, is common. However, religious violence claimed fewer lives in 2005 than in the previous year.

In May 2005, HRW said that the government deserved much of the blame for religious violence in Kano and Plateau states that killed nearly 1,000 people in 2004. The report concluded that many of the deaths could have been prevented if authorities had heeded warning signs, and that authorities still had not prosecuted the civilians and police responsible for the deaths. Hundreds of armed riot police were deployed to the northern city of Sokoto in June 2005 following clashes between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. More than a dozen people died in Sokoto between February and June in a dispute over access to mosques. Academic freedom is guaranteed and honored in practice.

Freedom of assembly and association are generally respected in practice. Thousands of demonstrators marched peacefully through Lagos in September to protest a rise in fuel costs after subsidies were cut; police were ordered not to carry firearms. However, Amnesty International said in November that brutal repression of protests remained a routine tactic of Nigerian security forces in the oil-rich Niger Delta, and that communities protesting in the region often suffered "collective punishment" by security forces. In 2005, security forces broke up several demonstrations in the southeast by the banned organization MASSOB, which claims that ethnic Igbos suffer discrimination by the government. Human rights groups report that dozens of pro-Biafran activists have been killed in the past six years and hundreds have been detained. (The Biafran civil war of the 1960s claimed some one million lives.) More than 50 people who participated in a soccer tournament in Lagos in the name of MASSOB in 2004 were detained for more than six months and charged with treason in March 2005. Authorities in October arrested MASSOB leader Ralph

Uwazuruike, who maintains that the movement is nonviolent.

Despite several statutory restrictions on the rights of trade unions, workers- except members of the armed forces and those considered essential employees- may join trade unions, and the right to bargain collectively is guaranteed. About 10 percent of the workforce is unionized. Legislation passed in March prevents umbrella unions, such as the Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC), from calling strikes; such action is now decided by individual unions. The new legislation makes union membership voluntary and gives unions the right to form outside the umbrella group. It also bans strikes in essential services such as health and education. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Nigeria has "serious shortcomings" in the application and enforcement of core labor standards.

The judiciary is subject to political influence and is hampered by corruption and inefficiency. Defendants do not always have legal representation and are often ill-informed about procedures and their rights. Lengthy pretrial detention remains a problem. In the 12 northern states where Sharia law is in effect, human rights groups say Islamic courts fail to respect due process rights, which leads to harsh and discriminatory sentences. Nigeria's prisons are overcrowded, unhealthy, and life-threatening. Nevertheless, the government has allowed international organizations to visit detention facilities, and some improvements have been made.

Abuses by security forces and a climate of impunity remain problems. In July, HRW said police still routinely torture detainees. According to the report, rape and mutilation are commonly used to extract confessions, and suspects are suspended from the ceiling by their hands, beaten with metal objects, sprayed with tear gas in their eyes, or shot in the feet; sometimes the injuries result in death. A UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions said in July that Nigerian police use armed robbery as a blanket charge to jail people when they refuse to pay bribes and to justify the unlawful killing of civilians. The local Centre for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria estimates that police at checkpoints shoot about 1 in 20 motorists who refuse or fail to pay bribes. A landmark police trial, in which six police officers were charged with the murder of six traders, opened in Abuja in July.

A human rights commission appointed by Obasanjo has concluded that three of Nigeria's former military rulers were personally liable for extrajudicial killings perpetrated while they were in power. The commission recommended that all three men- General Ibrahim Babangida, General Muhammadu Buhari, and General Abdulsalami Abubakar-be banned from holding high office in the future.

The constitution requires government offices to reflect the country's ethnic diversity. The Hausa-Fulani from northern Nigeria generally dominated the military and the government from independence until Obasanjo was elected in 1999. Obasanjo's government is both ethnically and religiously diverse. Although the constitution prohibits ethnic discrimination, societal discrimination is widely practiced, and clashes frequently erupt among the country's many ethnic groups. A number of armed youth groups have emerged to defend their

ethnic and economic interests. Ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta feel particularly discriminated against, primarily with regard to receiving a share of the country's oil wealth. Officials in 2005 said that the next census would probably exclude questions on religious or ethnic origin, fearing that highlighting differences could inflame tensions.

Militants loyal to Niger Delta ethnic militia leader Moujahid Dokubo-Asari claim to be fighting for political autonomy and a bigger slice of oil revenues for the Ijaw ethnic group, the largest in the Delta region. Clashes between the Ijaws and their rivals, the Itsekiris, have claimed hundreds of lives in the Delta. Threats by Dokubo-Asari's group to kill foreign oil workers in 2004 sent oil prices soaring. That same year, Dokubo-Asari agreed to disarm in exchange for cash and amnesty. The militants briefly took over a few oil facilities after Dokubo-Asari was arrested in 2005.

Nigerian women face societal discrimination, although educational opportunities have eroded a number of barriers over the years. In some ethnic groups, women are denied equal rights to inherit property and marital rape is not considered a crime. About 60 percent of Nigerian women are subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM); the practice has declined steadily in the past 15 years. The Ministry of Health and several women's groups at local and state levels are working to educate communities about the dangers of FGM. Although the federal government publicly opposes FGM, it has taken no legal action to end the practice. Women's rights have suffered serious setbacks in the northern states governed under Sharia. Amnesty International said in May 2005 that Nigerian women often suffer abuse in the family: "In most cases, the criminal justice system fails to offer protection, justice, or redress to women who have been subjected to violence in the home." The National Assembly in 2005 was considering a bill providing penalties for violence against women. Human trafficking to, from, and within the country for purposes of labor and prostitution is a problem. The government in 2004 outlawed human trafficking and set up an agency to deal with offenders.