



SPECIAL REPORT

1200 17th Street NW • Washington, DC 20036 • 202.457.1700 • fax 202.429.6063

ABOUT THE REPORT

Nigeria faces great political challenges as it prepares for its third successive multiparty elections, scheduled for April 2007. This report was commissioned as part of the project on Political Transitions in Africa, managed by Dorina Bekoe, at the United States Institute of Peace.

Jibrin Ibrahim is director of the Centre for Democracy and Development in Abuja. He has a doctorate in politics from the University of Bordeaux, France. Formerly a professor at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria and the Institute of Federalism in Switzerland, Ibrahim is a scholar-activist who has lectured and published extensively on democratization and governance in Africa. He was founding director of Global Rights: Partners for Justice in Nigeria and has led several national and international advocacy and research networks.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

Jibrin Ibrahim

Nigeria's 2007 Elections The Fitful Path to Democratic Citizenship

Summary

- In Nigeria 2007 will mark the first time a third consecutive presidential election will take place and the first time one elected leader will succeed another.
- Many observers fear, however, that the upcoming elections, like so many previous ones, will be marred by electoral fraud and rigging. Because of the country's history of electoral fraud, elections often have been associated with political tension, crisis, and even violence.
- The road map for the 2007 elections appears to be in jeopardy. The National Assembly has not reviewed the constitution to give real autonomy to the electoral commission. In addition, preparations such as registration of voters and issuance of voter identity cards still have not been completed.
- The major political parties are intensifying internal wrangling and elimination of rivals. The president and vice president are exchanging acrimonious allegations of corruption, further raising political tension in the country.
- Interethnic and regional tensions and conflicts also are increasing. Southern politicians are exerting pressure to retain power, while northern politicians insist that a long-standing pact says power should revert to their region.
- Over the past fifteen years, political tension has risen significantly in the petroleum-rich Niger Delta. Insurgency has spread and ethnic and youth militias have emerged. The state has lost the capacity to exercise authority effectively.
- The international community has played a major role in Nigerian elections since 1999, especially in monitoring activities. It is important that this help include effective monitoring of the whole election process. While the integrity of the elections can be protected effectively only by a vigilant citizenry, the international community has an important supporting role.
- In May 2006 the National Assembly threw out constitutional reform proposals designed to allow President Olusegun Obasanjo a third term in office. As soon as he began his second term in 2003, it was evident that plans were afoot to prolong his

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Importance of the 2007 Elections	2
Electoral Fraud and Competitive Rigging in Nigeria	2
The 2007 Election: Programmed Failure?	3
Intraparty Tension	4
Power Shift and Ethnoregional Tensions	5
Tension in the Niger Delta	6
Nigeria's Neighbors and the International Community	7
Third-Term Agenda and Citizens' Mobilization	8
Recommendations and Conclusion	10

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent conflicts, promote post-conflict peacebuilding, and increase conflict-management tools, capacity, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by its direct involvement in conflict zones around the globe.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

J. Robinson West (Chair), Chairman, PFC Energy, Washington, D.C. • **María Otero** (Vice Chair), President, ACCION International, Boston, Mass. • **Betty F. Bumpers**, Founder and former President, Peace Links, Washington, D.C. • **Holly J. Burkhalter**, Vice President of Government Affairs, International Justice Mission, Washington, D.C. • **Chester A. Crocker**, James R. Schlesinger Professor of Strategic Studies, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University • **Laurie S. Fulton**, Partner, Williams and Connolly, Washington, D.C. • **Charles Homer**, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C. • **Mora L. McLean**, President, Africa-America Institute, New York, N.Y. • **Barbara W. Snelling**, former State Senator and former Lieutenant Governor, Shelburne, Vt.

MEMBERS EX OFFICIO

Barry F. Lowenkron, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor • **Peter W. Rodman**, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs • **Richard H. Solomon**, President, United States Institute of Peace (nonvoting) • **Frances C. Wilson**, Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps; President, National Defense University

rule beyond the constitutionally determined tenure. The fact that he was stopped in his tracks gives hope that Nigerians will continue to struggle for democracy.

- A new consciousness is rising in the country that people must organize to defend their franchise. If a plan for a programmed failure of the 2007 elections does exist, chances are that Nigerians will combat it and try to salvage the elections. Observers are waiting to see if they can succeed.

Introduction

Elections have meaning for most people only in a democratic context, because they lead to the choice of decision makers by the majority of citizens. Elections and democracy are therefore inextricably linked. Three major challenges confront Nigerians as they move toward the 2007 elections. The first is that the political class has at its disposal a vast repertoire of electoral fraud techniques, already used to frustrate Nigerians' right to elect their leadership. The second is whether the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security forces have the will and capacity to prepare adequately for free and fair elections. The third is the growing tension within the political class, ethnoregional zones, and political parties that threatens the country's political stability. These challenges are not insurmountable, however. Indeed, Nigerians are showing increasing capacity to organize to protect the exercise of democracy.

Importance of the 2007 Elections

The 2007 elections are critical to the future of Nigerian democracy for a number of reasons. This will be the first time a third consecutive general election has taken place in the country. The military overthrew both the First and Second Republics after heavily rigged and acrimonious second-consecutive elections took place in 1965 and 1983, respectively. The Third Republic under Gen. Ibrahim Babangida was stillborn, as he annulled the 1993 first-round elections. Nigeria therefore has a history of problematic second elections and has not yet tried a third.

The Nigerian constitution imposes a two-term limit on the president and state governors. Over the past two years, the president and many governors have repeatedly tried to change the constitution to prolong their stay in office. Their attempts have failed so far. Given this background, the run-up to the 2007 elections is taking place in a very acrimonious context. The president and his deputy are involved in a fierce battle in which each has been trying to block the capacity of the other to stay in power in 2007.

One fundamental question Nigerians are posing is: Given President Obasanjo's will to determine the occupant of Aso Rock, the seat of power, in 2007, is there an impartial arbiter for the elections?

Electoral Fraud and Competitive Rigging in Nigeria

The very serious experts' report, prepared by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies just before the 1983 elections, correctly predicted that the elections could not be conducted without massive electoral fraud because the parties in power were not ready to allow others to come to power. The report also showed that only the 1959 and 1979 elections had taken place without systematic rigging. Those two elections had one point in common: They were held in the presence of strong arbiters, the colonial state and the military, that were not participants and desired free and fair elections.

As Kurfi (2005: 101) has observed, rigging is almost synonymous with Nigerian elections. The objective of electoral rigging or fraud is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of citizens who have voted or would have voted into office someone other than the victor. Are Nigerian elections doomed by the machinations of fraudsters who frustrate the people's democratic aspirations?

Precisely because of this history of electoral fraud, elections in the country have often been associated with political tension, crisis, and even violence (Adekanye, 1990: 2). The outcomes of many elections have been so fiercely contested that the survival of the democratic order has been compromised. This sad history of electoral fraud or rigging has serious implications for Nigeria's democratic future because the phenomenon is growing rather than declining. The principal forms of rigging and fraud were perfected in the elections of 1964, 1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, and 2003. The result is that the outcome of elections has been the subversion of the democratic process rather than its consolidation. Not surprisingly, major political conflicts have emerged around rigged elections (Kurfi, 2005: 97). The forms of electoral fraud include the following:

- 1) Compilation of fictitious names on voters' registers;
- 2) Illegal compilation of separate voters' lists;
- 3) Illegal printing of voters' cards;
- 4) Illegal possession of ballot boxes;
- 5) Stuffing of ballot boxes;
- 6) Falsification of election results;
- 7) Illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers;
- 8) Voting by children;
- 9) Illegal printing of forms used for collation and declaration of election results;
- 10) Deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas;
- 11) Announcing results in places where no elections were held;
- 12) Unauthorized announcement of election results;
- 13) Harassment of candidates, agents, and voters;
- 14) Change of list of electoral officials;
- 15) Box-switching and inflation of figures.¹

In 2003 Nigeria conducted the second general election since the return to civilian politics in May 1999. Those elections were almost as contentious as the infamous 1983 elections that precipitated the collapse of the Second Republic. The report by Nigerian observers confirmed numerous reports of fraud in many states across the country (Transition Monitoring Group, 2003: 120). The European Union observers' report also reported widespread election-related malpractice in a number of states in the Middle Belt, the South East and the South South (European Commission, 2003: 42). The varied forms of electoral malpractice and the high number of incidents of electoral violence rekindled old fears that the basic institutional weaknesses associated with the electoral system could bring the democratic experiment to grief. This fear is even more palpable as Nigeria moves toward the 2007 elections.

The 2007 Election: Programmed Failure?

Following extensive reviews of the 2003 elections and stakeholder meetings organized by INEC in December 2003 and February 2004, government agencies, political parties, civil society organizations and the electoral commission agreed that four critical obstacles to free and fair elections in 2007 had to be removed by 2005.

The outcomes of many elections have been so fiercely contested that the survival of the democratic order has been compromised.

The high number of incidents of electoral violence rekindled old fears.

The most significant improvement is the imposition of limits on campaign expenditure by political parties.

The first step was for the constitution to be reviewed and changed to give real autonomy to INEC, all of whose officers—chair, national commissioners, and resident state electoral officers—are appointed by the president. The consensus was that such powers should be removed from the hands of the president. In addition, INEC should receive financing directly from the consolidated revenue fund so that the executive cannot starve the commission of necessary funds.

Second, the revised electoral bill, which contains some improvements to the Electoral Act of 2002, needed to be passed into law. The most significant improvement is the imposition of limits on campaign expenditure by political parties. This law was finally enacted in June 2006.

Third, voter registration for the 2003 elections was done in an incomplete and inept manner, and as a result many citizens are not on the voters' roll. INEC has consistently refused to carry out the provisions of the Electoral Act, which requires continuous registration of voters. It has also refused to update the roll by registering those who have come of age since 2003 or were omitted in the previous registration. As happened previously, INEC seems to be waiting for time to run out so that registration will be organized in a hurried and botched manner. As of September 2006, seven months before the elections, the voter registration process had not commenced in earnest. In fact, nothing had been done except trial voter registration in the Federal Capital Territory.

Fourth, INEC has not finished distributing new voter identity cards with embossed photographs and biometric features. Three years after the national identity card process started, most people have not yet received their cards.

It seems as if a plan is unfolding to produce failed or no elections in 2007.

Clearly, INEC is not heeding most of the essential signposts on the road map to free and fair elections in a timely manner. It seems as if a plan is unfolding to produce failed or no elections in 2007. During his first year in office, Maurice Iwu, chair of the electoral commission, held the electoral preparation process hostage, arguing that INEC must use electronic voting machines for the 2007 elections. People were perplexed because whatever the merits of using voting machines, there was insufficient time to pass the legal and constitutional amendments, determine the type of voting machine that could work in the Nigerian context, and carry out the procurement process before the elections. By concentrating all its energy on the voting machines, the commission has neglected basic preparations for the elections, despite the fact that INEC had developed a strategic plan with clear timelines for the various elements. Citizens and civil society activists must urgently address this apparent strategy of programmed failure for the 2007 elections. There is ample evidence that if INEC is approaching its task in such a lackadaisical manner, the reasons might be connected with Gen. Obasanjo's botched third-term agenda.

Intraparty Tension

Nigeria has an illiberal democratic regime in which strict guidelines, defined by the constitution and monitored by INEC, govern the registration of political parties. The guidelines seek to ensure that all parties have a national, nonsectarian vision. But the parties have a persistent tendency to factionalize and fractionalize (Ibrahim 1991).

As 2007 approached, assassinations of party leaders started.

Our recent study shows that the country's four leading political parties are enmeshed in internal crisis with a high level of violence (Ibrahim 2006b). As 2007 approached, assassinations of party leaders started. The situation was the same as preceding the 2003 elections. Between June and August 2006, three gubernatorial candidates were assassinated.

To understand this kind of mafia-style activity in Nigerian politics, it is important to note that many political parties are operated by political "godfathers," who use money and violence to control the political process. They decide party nominations and campaign outcomes, and when candidates try to steer an independent course, they use their pre-

ferred instruments to deal with them. As a result they raise the level of electoral violence and make free and fair elections difficult. Although parties have formal procedures for the election of their leaders, these procedures are often disregarded; when they are adhered to, the godfathers have means of determining the outcomes.

Many political parties, especially parties of incumbents, rely on electoral fraud rather than popularity to stay in power. Therefore the political significance of parties is no longer determined by popular support, as is the case in all democratic countries in the world, but by administrative fiat. That is why so many of Nigeria's political parties devote considerable resources and energy to suspending and expelling members for so-called antiparty activities. Party barons are mainly interested in controlling the party machine rather than ensuring that they nominate the most popular candidates for competitive electoral posts. The Babalakin Commission of Inquiry into the 1983 elections correctly argued: "The nature of politics and political parties in the country is such that many men and women of ability and character simply keep out of national politics. For the most part, political parties are dominated by men of influence who see funding of political parties as an investment that must yield rich dividends" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1986: 348).

Indeed, Nigerian parties have a wide range of techniques to eliminate popular candidates from party primaries, including:

- A declaration by powerful "party owners"—party barons, state governors, godfathers, and others—that those entitled to vote must support one candidate and other aspirants must withdraw. Since these people are very powerful and feared in their communities, their declarations carry much weight.
- Zoning and other procedures exclude unwanted candidates by moving the party zone out of the seat or position in question to an area where the excluded candidate is not local.²
- Candidates who oppose the godfathers' protégés are often subject to violence by thugs or security personnel.
- Money, a significant factor in party primaries, is used to bribe officials and induce voters to support particular candidates. Since the godfather generally has more money than the "independent" candidates, many of the latter are eliminated because they cannot match his spending.
- What Nigerians call "results by declaration": An aspirant wins a nomination or election, but polling officials disregard the results and declare the loser the winner (Ibrahim, 2006b).³

As the major political parties intensify their internal wrangling and try to eliminate internal rivals, intraparty crisis becomes an obstacle to the organization of free and fair elections. For example, in September 2006 President Obasanjo wrote the senate requesting that it investigate Vice President Atiku Abubakar on corruption charges. Since then each side has been making highly charged allegations of corrupt practices against the other, further raising the level of political tension in the country.

Power Shift and Ethnoregional Tensions

The language of Nigerian politics often plays out in terms of ethnoregional domination. This is a language whose grammar is defined in two ways. The first is through control of political power and its instruments, such as the armed forces and the judiciary. The second is through control of economic power and resources. Both affect the allocation of resources to groups and individuals. Both contribute to the climate of fear that is pervasive in Nigerian politics. As Kirk-Greene (1975: 19) put it: "Fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the physical fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of retribution, but the psychological fear of discrimination, of domination. It is the fear of not getting one's fair share, one's desert."

Many political parties rely on electoral fraud rather than popularity to stay in power.

Each side has been making highly charged allegations of corrupt practices against the other.

Calls for a power shift started coming from the South during the Abacha era (1993–96).

Calls for a power shift started coming from the South during the Abacha era (1993–96). According to Charles Ibiang in *Thisday* (Lagos, February 2, 1999), the argument at that time was that only four of Nigeria's twelve heads of state since independence had come from southern Nigeria, and the southern rulers were in power for only six out of thirty-eight years. The occupant of the seat of power therefore should be from the southern zone.

As Alex Ekwueme, vice president during the Second Republic, argued in the *Guardian* (Lagos, January 26, 1999), the term "power shift" was invented as an alternative to the concepts of zoning and rotation that dominated the national constitutional conference of 1994–95. Section 229 of the 1995 draft constitution stipulated that the presidency should rotate between the North and the South. Gubernatorial power was to rotate among the three senatorial districts in each state, with the chairmanship of local governments alternating among the wards created in each district. However, these constitutional proposals were completely discredited when it became clear that General Abacha was going to continue as "elected" president. Therefore the zoning was going to start from the North, the region that had monopolized power for many years.

This maneuver brought back memories of the Second Republic. The then-ruling National Party of Nigeria had adopted a zoning and rotation policy for the presidency; but when M.K.O. Abiola (a southerner) tried to compete for the party's presidential nomination for the 1983 election, he received only insults from the party hierarchy. The concept of power shift arose, therefore, to remove the ambiguity associated with zoning and rotation. The idea was to focus on the essential issue of a southerner taking power. Unsurprisingly, the concept has been an emotionally charged one.

The north-south divide is compounded by identity consciousness. The colonial-era zones, based partly on ethnic divisions, have been formally adopted as the country's geopolitical zones, with new names: the North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East, and South South. The power shift debate is exacerbated by the fact that the South East claims to have exercised national power for only six months, during the 1966 Ironsi regime, while the South South protests that it has never exercised national power. Each is ready to take its turn in 2007, and each fears the domination of the other. One of the main challenges for the 2007 elections is to settle these zone and regional demands for power in a negotiated and nonconfrontational manner. This task will be particularly difficult in the Niger Delta.

The transition in 1999, when power supposedly shifted to the South, was determined by a pact. It is widely claimed that this pact involved southern assurances that after President Obasanjo's tenure, power would shift back to the North, and north-south alternation would commence. As Nigeria moves toward the 2007 elections, the expectation of a shift to the North has become acrimonious. Many southern politicians are currently arguing that the North has held power for thirty-nine years, while the South will have held power for only fifteen years at the end of Obasanjo's tenure in 2007.

The Nigerian idea of seeing power as vested in zones rather than political parties or the military is much older than the power shift concept. In 1950 a constitutional conference adopted the population principle, which guaranteed the North slightly more than 50 percent of political representation. The population issue is still lurking as Nigeria prepares for the 2007 elections. The 2006 census results will be announced before the elections. Whether or not the relative north-south population distributions change, the figures are bound to generate controversy and political tension.

Tension in the Niger Delta

Today about 80 percent of Nigeria's external revenue comes from Niger Delta petroleum. Over the years the population of the South South has gradually developed a strong "oil consciousness," directed to obtaining more benefits from this mainstay of the Nigerian

The concept of power shift arose to remove the ambiguity associated with zoning and rotation.

The expectation of a shift to the North has become acrimonious.

economy. According to Ben Naanen (1995: 50), the southern minorities are suffering from “internal colonialism” that manifests itself not through economic domination but through control of political power used to transfer resources from numerically weaker to numerically stronger groups, in the process creating “an economically advantaged powerful core and an impoverished and weak periphery.”

Central to the southern minorities’ current position is the argument that they are the major providers of Nigeria’s oil wealth and the major victims of pollution resulting from oil spillage and gas flaring. The Niger Delta movement took a radical political form with the declaration in 1990 of the Ogoni Bill of Rights, demanding political autonomy, and the uprising that still continues. Ken Saro-Wiwa, the leader of the Ogoni political struggle, and eight of his colleagues were hanged by the military government in November 1995, but the southern minorities’ struggles have not abated since then. Indeed, conflict over access to oil wealth and protection from pollution has spread to the other oil-producing communities.

Over the past fifteen years in the Niger Delta insurgency has spread and the conflict has reached unprecedented levels (Ikelegbe, 2001: 393). Ethnic and youth militias have emerged throughout the zone. At the beginning of the Obasanjo regime, the government tried to use strong-arm tactics, resulting in the Odi and Choba massacres in 1999. This effort did not work. While joint military task forces continue to patrol the area, the state has lost the capacity to exercise authority effectively in the Niger Delta. Militia groups regularly attack and kill military personnel. They abduct foreign petroleum workers and release them after their companies pay ransom. They regularly sabotage petroleum facilities, and bunkering (theft of petroleum) has become a serious problem.

Elections have aggravated the political crisis in the Niger Delta. During the 2003 elections the level of violence there was the highest in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2004: 11–33). “Prior to the 1999 and 2003 federal, state, and local elections, all parties, but most effectively the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP), recruited and armed members of youth groups to intimidate opposition politicians and their supporters” (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 4).

Many of these armed youth have freed themselves from their former patrons and are now independent, well-armed actors with experience and knowledge of the terrain. Engaging in oil bunkering and threatening to sabotage oil facilities and abduct their staff, they are making huge profits (Ikelegbe, 2005: 217). For example, “The leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Asari Dokubo is a self-acknowledged oil bunker (*Newswatch* [Lagos] September 20, 2004: 17). However, bunkering is seen as part of the struggle. It is seen as taking, albeit illegally, what naturally belongs to them but is appropriated by non-indigenes” (Ikelegbe, 2005: 226).

These groups are ready to act in the 2007 elections, and the risk of violence is extremely high. Dokubo’s wife recently told *The Exclusive* (Lagos, September 12, 2006) that her husband had been arrested to stop his election as governor of Rivers state. Quoted in *The Punch* (Lagos, September 8, 2006), the very well-informed director of Academic Associates PeaceWorks, Judith Asuni, recently alerted the nation about “a large influx of arms by politicians preparing the grounds for the next elections.”

The core problems of poverty and environmental degradation remain, and they fuel the anger expressed in demands for resource control or ownership of petroleum resources (Fayemi, Amadi, and Bamidele 2005). This anger could incite a major conflict, especially if power does not shift to the southern zone in 2007.

Over the past fifteen years in the Niger Delta insurgency has spread and the conflict has reached unprecedented levels.

The core problems of poverty and environmental degradation fuel the anger expressed in demands for resource control.

Nigeria’s Neighbors and the International Community

Nigeria has always claimed a major role in African affairs in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution, economic integration, and, increasingly, good governance and promotion of democracy. The Nigerian army has intervened as a peacekeeper and peace enforcer in

It is imperative that Nigeria's neighbors closely monitor the road map to the 2007 elections.

The international community has an important supporting role that it should live up to.

Obasanjo's push for a third term had the effect of sabotaging the constitutional review process.

numerous conflicts, including the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Sudan, often at great cost to the treasury and the lives of the country's soldiers.

President Obasanjo has portrayed himself as a monitor of good governance and democracy vis-à-vis Nigeria's neighbors. For example, he intervened in Togo in 2005 to stop Faure Eyadema from stepping into his father's presidential shoes without elections and successfully campaigned to stop Yahya Jammeh from taking over the leadership of the African Union in 2005 because of his poor human rights record as president of Gambia. If the elections fail and Nigeria, with its large population, descends into violent conflict, the stability of the whole region will be seriously threatened. It is therefore imperative that Nigeria's neighbors closely monitor the road map to the 2007 elections and encourage the government to practice the principles it has been preaching to others.

The international community has played a major role in Nigerian elections since 1999. Its representatives have been especially active in election monitoring. For example, the report of the European Union observer mission on the 2003 election was particularly influential in establishing the limited credibility of the results. Other monitors included the United States (through the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center), the Commonwealth, and the African Union. Currently the major development partners in the country are providing significant support to both INEC and civil society for the electoral process. The European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Japan have pooled their resources with UNDP to support the elections. The U.S. government is also providing significant support. It is important that this support be extended to include effective monitoring of the whole election process.

Maurice Iwu, the INEC chair, already has warned the international community that its role is not to monitor the elections and has said that even its election observation role will be curtailed. This is a disturbing signal that both national civil society groups and the international community should contest. Although a vigilant citizenry can effectively protect the integrity of the elections, the international community has an important supporting role that it should live up to.

Third-Term Agenda and Citizens' Mobilization

Gen. Obasanjo came to power in 1999 in a groundswell of optimism that Nigerian leaders had learned their lesson and henceforth would respect the desire of the people for the rule of law, democracy, and federalism. Obasanjo had three important strengths. His war record had demonstrated his nationalist credentials. Second, his handover of power to the elected Shehu Shagari regime in 1979 had shown his capacity to bow to democratic demands for a Second Republic. Finally, his engagement in civil society with the Africa Leadership Forum and Transparency International had shown a track record of democratic struggle and commitment to combat corruption. These activities led Nigerians to believe this president would not be like the other military leaders, who had tried to manipulate the country to perpetuate their rule and loot the treasury.

Nigerians were wrong. Obasanjo failed to resist the temptation of believing that because he enjoys ruling, he is the only one who can rule. Over the past three years, he has deployed various stratagems, including the organization of a huge national political reform conference as a springboard for self-perpetuation (for details see National Civil Society Coalition Against Third Term, 2006). His push for a third term had the effect of sabotaging the constitutional review process under way at the time and has been jettisoned.

Despite the rather pessimistic tone so far in this report, it is unwise to give up on a relatively positive outcome of the 2007 election and indeed the deepening of Nigerian democracy. The outcome of President Obasanjo's attempt to prolong his rule is a case in point.

In May 2006 the upper and lower chambers of the National Assembly threw out constitutional reform proposals designed to allow the president a third term in office, against the letter and spirit of the 1999 constitution. Obasanjo is already Nigeria's longest-serving ruler; he had been a military dictator and is now in his eighth year as a "democratically" elected president. Indications started emerging as soon as he began his second term in 2003 that plans were developing to prolong his rule beyond its constitutionally designated end on May 29, 2007. The major argument was that the president was engaged in a successful process of economic reform and a struggle against corruption and needed more time to institutionalize the reforms and make them irreversible. However, numerous forces in the country opposed the prolongation agenda and fought against it, leading to its defeat. It was an intense battle in which vast resources were deployed in political mobilization and networks of activists played a major role.

At the heart of the struggle were different perspectives about the future of Nigerian democracy and economic development. The third-term struggle was indeed a political vehicle by which Nigerians sought to define and act for a democratic future. Precisely because of this larger dimension of the struggle, it is useful to point to the increasing importance of activism in the construction of democratic citizenship in the country.

The president's agents had developed an elaborate plan for the prolongation agenda, first presented at the 2005 National Political Reform Conference in Abuja. The idea was to use the strength of state governors to push through the plan. Most conference delegates were appointed by governors, and a constitution was surreptitiously introduced to the conference with a prolongation plan. The delegates nonetheless rejected the proposal, despite great pressure from the governors and the presidency.

Following that setback, additional forces marshalled to push through the plan at the National Assembly. These forces included the top political fixers in the country, the business community organized in a forum known as Corporate Nigeria, which provided both finance and economic arguments for the prolongation. Security agencies under the leadership of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission engaged in selective prosecution of actors who opposed Obasanjo's self-perpetuation plan. In addition, assuming that every Nigerian has a price, the president's team paid huge bribes—apparently up to \$400,000 per legislator—to supporters of the plan. The party machine was also brought into play. All those who resisted the prolongation plan were threatened with expulsion, while supporters were assured of automatic renomination for the 2007 elections. And yet they failed.

The reason for failure was that although Nigerian political parties and most of the political class have an antidemocratic political culture, the Nigerian people have a resilient commitment to democracy, demonstrated during the struggle against the annulment of the June 1993 elections. In the battle against third term, civil society played a major role. The National Civil Society Coalition Against Third Term, the Transition Monitoring Group, and United Action for Democracy, among others, were prominent. The political opposition, including the vice president, some governors, and political parties, were also active. In the National Assembly a small group of legislators known as the 2007 Movement opposed the change, and their numbers and strength grew as more Nigerians rose to oppose the third-term agenda. Many religious leaders openly and vigorously condemned the third-term proposal.⁴ Even bankers played a major role by phoning and informing journalists about amounts and recipients of bribes passing through their banks.

The mass media, especially private television stations and newspapers, became the vanguard of the struggle, running a very effective "name and shame" campaign against legislators supporting the third-term agenda. Even musicians performed songs and poems condemning the third-term advocates. Street kids assaulted legislators from their constituencies who were supporting the third-term agenda. At the end of the day, legislators realized that supporting it was not in their interest and the whole plan collapsed. In the process of this struggle, key segments of Nigerian society played a crucial role in con-

The third-term struggle was a political vehicle by which Nigerians sought to define and act for a democratic future.

The Nigerian people have a resilient commitment to democracy.

Currently a new consciousness that people must organize to defend the franchise is rising in the country.

The real challenge in producing free and fair elections in 2007 involves what happens before that date.

The need to encourage opposition politics is of crucial importance to the future of Nigerian democracy.

structing democratic citizenship. As Nigeria moves toward the 2007 elections, can this activism be sustained to ensure that the elections are not sabotaged?

The 2003 elections were not rigged everywhere in the country (Ibrahim and Egwu 2005). In many places citizens and opposition politicians succeeded in organizing and protecting their right to a free and fair election. Currently a new consciousness that people must organize to defend the franchise is rising in the country. This is a positive sign. Nigerians are no longer assuming that their votes count; they are seeking to ensure that they vote and that their votes are counted. During the struggle against the third term, many communities initiated procedures for the recall of the representatives who were supporting that agenda. People now know they can recall, or attempt to recall, their legislators, and such action empowers them to demand accountability. If indeed there is a plan for a programmed failure of the 2007 elections, Nigerians will combat it and try to salvage the elections. Observers are waiting to see the degree of their success.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Nigerians should look to the future bearing in mind a number of important issues that need to be addressed.

1. Civil society and, indeed, all Nigerians must prevent President Obasanjo from prolonging his term beyond the two mandates stipulated by the constitution or imposing his choice of a future leader irrespective of the wishes of the majority. His agenda has the potential to derail the democratic process because it betrays political trust and requires extensive manipulation.
2. Civic education should be accorded a high priority between now and the 2007 elections. The argument has been made that the real challenge in producing free and fair elections in 2007 involves what happens before that date. The tasks of enlightening the citizenry of their rights and duties and defending the integrity of their votes are crucial. In the 2003 elections, groups that carried out civic education did so too close to the elections. Its full benefits could not be realized. Considering the fact that politicians use religion and ethnicity as tools of political manipulation, the content of civic education should provide effective responses to such tendencies. Similarly, people should be educated about how to demand accountability from their leaders through town hall meetings and by making effective use of the constitution's recall provisions.
3. A major focus of civic education should be monitoring INEC. We now know from the 2006 verdict of the Anambra Elections Tribunal that INEC officials actively colluded in falsifying the election results and trying to frustrate the tribunal's work in that state. As INEC has the constitutional role of a neutral administrator and monitor of the elections, citizens must ensure that it fulfills those tasks. INEC's choice of ad hoc electoral staff in particular should be closely monitored.
4. The need to encourage opposition politics is of crucial importance to the future of Nigerian democracy. It is widely known that Nigerian politicians always want to be on the winning side and therefore prefer to strike deals with the winning party. This is a defeatist attitude. It will serve the cause of democracy better if opposition parties remain steadfast, build strength and capacity into their programs and manifestoes, and provide the electorate with credible alternatives in future elections. It is important to note that in states like Kano, Kogi, and Borno, where incumbents were defeated in the 2003 election, the vigilance of the opposition made such outcomes possible.
5. The mass media also need to play a more significant role in promoting and strengthening the credibility of the electoral system. Three main points are important in this

regard. First, democratic stakeholders should encourage proliferation of privately controlled, as opposed to government, media. Privately owned media are more likely to give better coverage to opposition political parties. Second, Nigeria needs to explore the possibility of community radio stations, which are inexpensive to establish. The present legal regime is not favorable to such stations, and parliament should create an enabling environment for them. Third, activists have not made adequate use of the Internet and e-mail to reach out and put information concerning elections in the public domain. The possibilities of using the Internet for national and international advocacy in securing free and fair elections should be developed.

6. Government at all levels should confront mass poverty and unemployment. As long as people remain poor and lack access to basic means of livelihood, they will remain susceptible to all kinds of manipulation, including fomenting violence during elections. In other words, increasing political awareness without addressing the problem of poverty will not change the situation.
7. People's forums should be established to encourage citizens to bring their representatives to town hall meetings to engage in face-to-face interaction and demand accountability. Churches, market women, motorcycle taxi operators, and the media should build linkages, alliances, and coordination to check the excesses of those in power.
8. Ethnic and community associations should become more active in identifying credible individuals who could be persuaded to enter the electoral arena. Communities should start sponsoring the election of such candidates so that the field of electoral contest is not dominated by the rich and powerful. People who have an interest in politics should be encouraged.

Increasing political awareness without addressing the problem of poverty will not change the situation.

Notes

1. For an analysis of the relationship between the Nigerian party regime and propensities for rigging, see Ibrahim 1991. For additional details on current trends, see Ibrahim 2006a and Ibrahim 2006b.

2. Nigerian parties restrict the right to be nominated by a political party or to seek political appointment to residents of a particular geographic zone. For example, in 1999 only candidates from the South West zone could run in the presidential race. Zoning occurs at all three levels of Nigerian federalism—federal, state, and local.

3. See Ibrahim 2004: 7–12 for a study of the techniques for eliminating prospective “undesirable” candidates from political party primaries.

4. President Obasanjo declared in an interview that he had not completed his project for Nigeria and his God was not a god of uncompleted projects. The response of most religious leaders was that their God was not a supporter of dictators.

Bibliography

- Adekanye, J. Bayo. 1990. “Elections in Nigeria: Problems, Strategies and Options,” *Nigerian Journal of Electoral and Political Behaviour*, 1, no. 1.
- European Commission, Nigeria. 2003. *European Union Election Observation Mission Final Report*.
- Fayemi, K., S. Amadi, and O. Bamidele, eds. 2005. *Towards an Integrated Development in the Niger Delta*. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. 1986. *Report of the Judicial Commission Inquiry into the Affairs of Federal Electoral Commission: 1979–1983*.
- Human Rights Watch. 2004. *Nigeria's 2003 Elections: The Unacknowledged Violence*. New York.
- . 2005. *Rivers and Blood: Guns, Oil and Power in Nigeria's Rivers State*. New York.
- Ibrahim, Jibrin. 1991. *L'Accès à l'état. Classes sociales, élites, factions: Une étude du National Party of Nigeria*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Bordeaux.

An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our Web site (www.usip.org), together with additional information on the subject.

- . 2004. "Introduction," in Jibrin Ibrahim, and Amina Salihu, eds. *Women, Marginalisation and Politics in Nigeria*. Abuja: Open Society Initiative for West Africa, Global Rights and Centre for Democracy and Development.
- . 2006a. "Legislation and the Political Process: The Third-Term Agenda and the Future of Nigerian Democracy," seminar paper, Centre for Democracy and Development, London, April.
- . 2006b. *Research and Dialogue with Political Parties: The Nigeria Report*. Stockholm: International IDEA and Centre for Democracy and Development.
- . and Egwu, Sam, eds. 2005. *Nigeria Elections 2007: Defending the People's Mandate*. Abuja: Global Rights.
- Ikelegbe, Augustine. 2001. "Civil Society, Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 39, no. 3.
- . 2005. "The Economy of Conflict in the Oil-Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 14, no. 2.
- Kirk-Greene, A.H.M. 1975. *The Genesis of the Nigerian Civil War and the Theory of Fear*. Uppsala, Sweden: NAI.
- Kurfi, Ahmadu. 2005. *Nigerian General Elections 1951–2003: My Roles and Reminiscences*. Abuja: Spectrum Books.
- Naanen, Ben. 1995. "Oil-Producing Minorities and the Re-structuring of Nigerian Federalism: The Case of the Ogoni People," *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 33, no. 1.
- National Civil Society Coalition Against Third Term. 2006. *Don't Destroy Our Unity with Third Term Agenda*. Abuja.
- Transition Monitoring Group. 2003. *Do the Votes Count: Final Report of the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria*. Abuja.

Of Related Interest

A number of publications from the United States Institute of Peace examine issues related to Nigeria.

Recent Institute reports include

- *Responding to Crisis in Nigeria*, by Paul Wee (USIPeace Briefing, April 2006)
- *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*, by Rotimi Suberu (United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001)

To obtain an Institute report (available free of charge), write United States Institute of Peace, 1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington DC 20036-3011; call (202) 429-6063; or e-mail: usip_requests@usip.org.



**United States
Institute of Peace**
1200 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
www.usip.org