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Background to Nigeria's 2015 Elections

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A Report of the CSIS Africa Program

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INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Background to Nigeria's 2015 Elections

Alexander Thurston

Introduction

On February 14, Nigeria will hold elections to choose its president, senators, and representatives. Two weeks later, Nigerians will return to the polls to elect state governors and state houses of assembly. Official campaigning began in November 2014. Late changes to the electoral calendar are possible—hours after the previous general election began in April 2011, authorities postponed the different phases of the vote by one week due to the late arrival of ballots and results sheets. The February 2015 elections could witness similar rearrangements. Due to previous court decisions that mandated rerun elections in certain states, seven states (Anambra, Bayelsa, Kogi, Edo, Ondo, Ekiti, and Osun) will not hold gubernatorial elections, though they will elect legislators for State Houses of Assembly.¹

The presidential election will be fiercely contested. Incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan is seeking reelection, while a largely unified opposition is striving to capitalize on discontent in various regions, particularly the Muslim-majority north. Meanwhile, open gubernatorial races will bring new leadership to some of the most populous and economically important states in the federation, including Lagos, Kano, and Rivers, as well as to sites of recurring intercommunal violence, such as Plateau. Nigerian elections officials hope to build on technical gains achieved in 2011 while avoiding the postelection riots that provided a tragic aftermath to that year's vote.

The Importance of the Elections

This election comes as Nigeria is torn between opportunity and crisis, perhaps more so than at any point since its first decade of independence. The vote carries high stakes for governance, security, and the economy. The elections also have ramifications for Africa as a whole. Nigeria is the continent's most populous country, with an estimated 170 million inhabitants, and its largest economy, with a gross domestic product of \$509 billion in 2013. Beyond its economic heft, Nigeria exercises influence in Africa in various ways, including in conflict resolution and deployment of

¹ Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria, "Time Table and Schedule of Activities for General Elections, 2015," January 24, 2014, <http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/General-Elections.pdf>.

peacekeepers to conflict zones and by taking a leadership role in regional crises like the ongoing Ebola outbreak.

Nigeria holds tremendous promise and has made important gains in the last decade. Its economy is growing rapidly. This is partly due to oil—Nigeria is Africa’s largest producer, generating as much as 2.5 million barrels per day—but growth has been faster in the non-oil sector. Amid intense activity in telecommunications, entertainment, real estate, services, and other sectors, Nigeria’s middle class has expanded by as much as 600 percent since 2000.² Highly skilled members of the diaspora are returning home.

Economic growth has fueled new social movements and expressions. Nigerian novelists, musicians, and filmmakers are earning global attention. The press is vibrant. Civil society has proven capable of swaying government policy; when the government removed fuel subsidies in 2012, labor unions, online activists, youth, and others led protests that resulted in a partial restoration of the subsidies. By many measures, Nigeria merits its reputation as Africa’s political, economic, and cultural giant.

On the other hand, Nigeria’s growth is uneven. Promises of prosperity, electrification, and infrastructural development have gone largely unfulfilled. Over 60 percent of Nigerians live in extreme poverty.³ More than 50 percent have no electricity.⁴ Meanwhile, insecurity wracks the country. In the far northeast, the Boko Haram sect regularly targets authorities and civilians. It has attacked sites across much of the country, including the United Nations building and the National Police Force headquarters in the capital Abuja; in summer 2014, the sect began taking and holding territory, particularly in Borno State. In central Nigeria, intercommunal clashes recur, heightening tensions between ethnic groups and between Muslims and Christians. In the oil-rich Niger Delta, discontent and criminality have lingered despite a 2009 amnesty agreement between the government and local militants. Instability in different parts of Nigeria will pose problems for the administration of the elections. Economic and security issues will be foremost in many voters’ minds, although many also perceive the influence of “godfathers”—wealthy, well-connected Nigerians, some of them officeholders and others behind-the-scenes operators—as the most decisive force in Nigerian politics.

² “Rise of the Middle Class in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Standard Bank Blog, August 20, 2014, <http://www.blog.standardbank.com/node/61428>.

³ “Nigerians Living in Poverty Rise to Nearly 61%,” BBC News, February 13, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17015873>.

⁴ Joe Brock, “Nigerian Poverty Rising Despite Economic Growth,” Reuters, February 13, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/13/us-nigeria-poverty-idUSTRE81C0KR20120213>.

Political Geography

To understand Nigeria's politics requires some knowledge of the country's complex political geography. Nigeria is a federation comprising 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja. The current political map dates to 1996 and reflects a long process of subdividing the country's political units—indeed, many voices even today urge further state creation in order to represent communities who perceive themselves as marginalized. The two most populous states are the southwestern commercial hub Lagos, home to Africa's most populous city; and Kano, the commercial center of the north. Other key states include the three core states of the oil-producing Niger Delta: Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers.

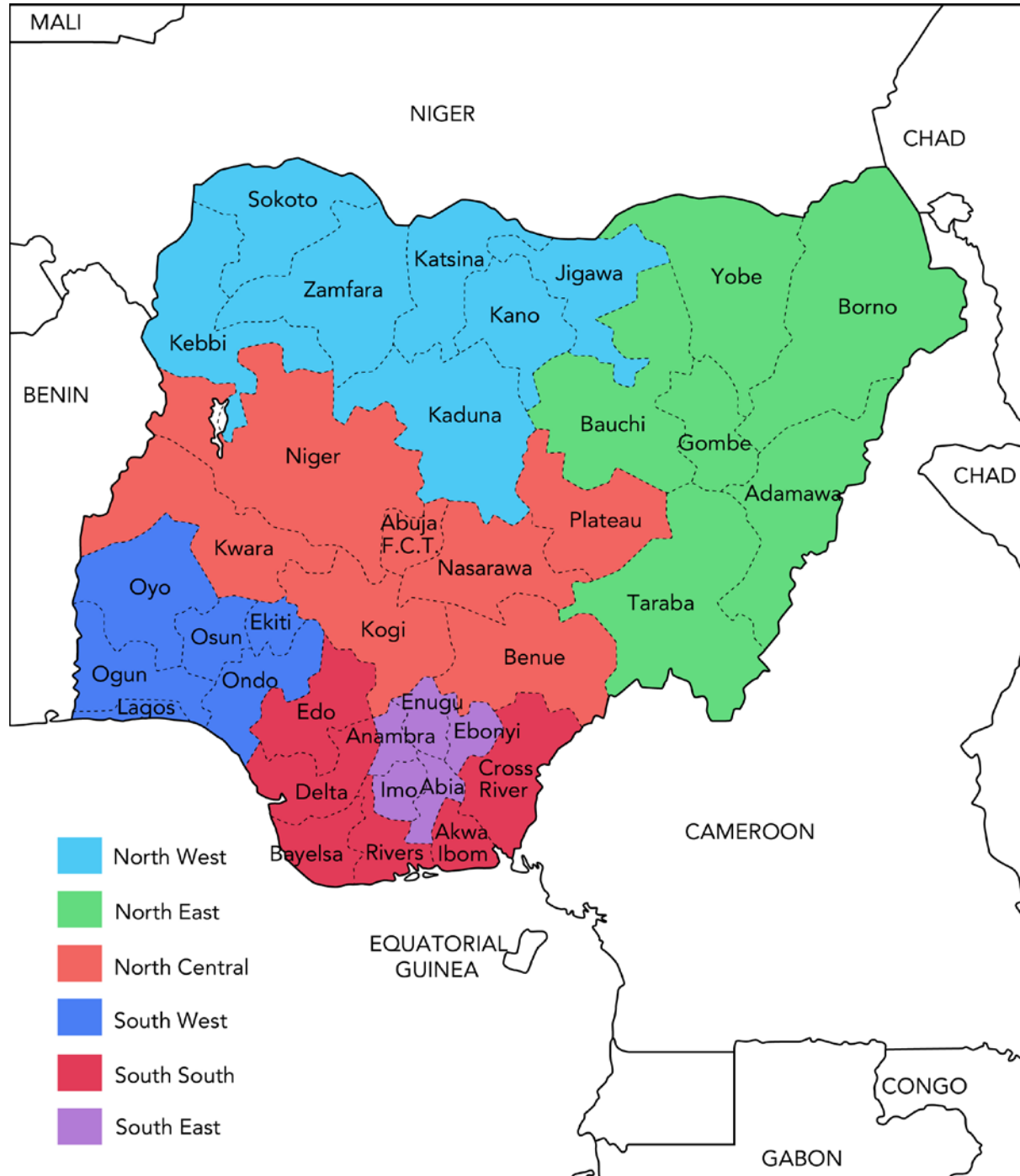
The international media typically portray Nigeria as divided between a majority-Muslim north and a majority-Christian south. This division has some analytical value: it reflects Nigeria's inheritance of de facto separate rule under British colonialism (1861–1956 in the south, 1900–1959 in the north). Despite Britain's "amalgamation" of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, the two regions have enduring differences and disparities: infrastructural development and completion of secular schooling remain significantly lower in the north than in the south. However, the north contains significant Christian minorities, and the southwest is home to millions of Yoruba Muslims.

Although the north-south division gives some insight into Nigeria, Nigerian commentators and officials often speak of six "geopolitical zones": North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East, and South South, each containing between five and seven states. Like the states, the zones roughly represent cultural and historical entities. The North West contains a portion of a precolonial Muslim polity, the Sokoto Caliphate. The North East includes part of another precolonial Muslim empire, Kanem-Bornu. The Hausa are the largest ethnic group in the North West and North East, and in the country as a whole, but there are other large groups in these northern zones, including the Fulani and the Kanuri. The North Central is the "Middle Belt," part of the colonial Northern Region but one of Nigeria's most ethnically diverse areas. The South West holds the lands of the Yoruba, the second-largest ethnic group in Nigeria after the northern Hausa, while the South East is home to many Ibo, the country's third-largest ethnicity; the South East overlaps with the center of the defunct Biafra, whose attempted breakaway led to Nigeria's 1967–1970 civil war. Finally, the South South contains the Niger Delta and many non-Ibo minorities. Jonathan, who hails from the South South, won the majority of votes in 2011 in his home zone as well as the South West, the South East, and the North Central.

The principle of proportional geographic representation pervades Nigerian political life. For example, one federal cabinet minister must come from each of the 36 states. Many Nigerians expect elected offices, including state governorships and the

presidency, to rotate among geographic areas within a state or within the country. Rotational or “zoning” systems are meant to ensure that power is shared among the constituencies that make up Nigeria and its sub-units.

Map of Geopolitical Zones



The Electoral Process

For most national and statewide elected offices in Nigeria, the winner must capture a plurality of votes cast. Winning the presidency involves special stipulations. The 1999 constitution states that the victorious candidate must not only secure a plurality of votes cast, but also “not less than one-quarter of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the States in the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory [FCT], Abuja.”⁵ If no candidate meets this threshold, a runoff election must take place between the highest-scoring candidate and the runner-up with the greatest number of majorities in the greatest number of states. The winner of the runoff must secure both a majority of the total vote and the same threshold of votes in two-thirds of the states and the FCT; otherwise, a second runoff occurs, in which the winner must secure a simple majority.⁶ Since the constitution came into effect, no presidential election has gone to a runoff, but the two-thirds requirement shapes electoral campaigning. It creates incentives for candidates to ensure—whether by fair or foul means—that they meet the threshold.

All national and statewide elected officials serve four-year terms, unless courts overturn election results; such decisions are common for Nigerian state and legislative elections, although unprecedented in presidential contests. Each state has three senators and between 5 and 24 representatives. Senators and representatives are not term-limited, but the president and state governors may serve only two terms. Given the particular circumstances surrounding President Goodluck Jonathan’s tenure, which began with the death of his predecessor President Umaru Yar’Adua in May 2010, it is debatable whether the constitution permits Jonathan to serve another term. One constitutional provision indicates that a president may only be elected twice,⁷ suggesting that Jonathan (who has only been elected once) is eligible to run again. Some Nigerian commentators interpret a different section of the constitution to mean that a Nigerian president may only take the oath of office twice⁸—an interpretation that would leave Jonathan ineligible to run in 2015. At this late date, it is unlikely that Nigerian courts will bar Jonathan from running.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) administers Nigerian national and state elections. The constitution stipulates that INEC will have a chairperson/chief electoral commissioner, 12 national electoral commissioners, and a resident electoral commissioner for each state and the FCT. The president appoints INEC’s commissioners, whose selection must also be ratified by the Senate. In addition to administering elections, INEC registers voters, registers and audits political parties, and regulates political campaigns.⁹ The National Assembly passed Electoral Acts in

⁵ Chapter VI, Section 134(2), a-b.

⁶ Chapter VI, Section 134 (3-5).

⁷ Chapter VI, Section 137 (1), b.

⁸ Chapter VI, Section 135 (2), b.

⁹ Nigerian Constitution of 1999, Third Schedule, Part I, F—Independent National Electoral Commission.

2006 and 2010 and an amendment in 2011. One significant addition in 2010 was the requirement for parties to hold primaries.¹⁰ During the lead-up to 2015, INEC called for further amendments; the Senate passed an amendment in July 2014 expanding INEC's powers to determine voting procedures (in other words, allowing INEC to use electronic voting),¹¹ and as of January 2015 the Senate was debating another amendment that would address voting for displaced persons.

INEC's 12 current national commissioners include academics, a medical doctor, and several career public servants. The commission includes two members from each geopolitical zone.¹² INEC's chairman is Attahiru Jega, a university professor and administrator from Kebbi State. Jonathan appointed Jega in 2010, replacing businessman Maurice Iwu (who served from 2005 to 2010). Jega earned international acclaim for INEC's administration of the 2011 elections, although some observers have noted that voter turnout was abnormally high in parts of the pro-Jonathan South East and South South, especially in areas where Jonathan's vote share exceeded 90 percent and even 95 percent¹³—margins that are abnormally high for free and fair elections.

Jega has faced several controversies since 2011. Some reflect Nigeria's sectional divisions. For example, Jega withdrew his plan to create 30,000 new polling units (to relieve pressure on the existing approximately 120,000 units) after critics, including some INEC commissioners,¹⁴ accused him of planning to favor northern constituencies. Other controversies have called INEC's technical capacity into question. In November 2014, as INEC proceeded with the third phase of voter registration (covering Lagos and eight other states), the Nigerian press buzzed with stories of tardy INEC officials, protesting registrants, insufficient permanent voters' cards, stolen cards, and other irregularities.¹⁵ Some opposition politicians, journalists, and civil society activists argue that such irregularities presage problems with the administration of the vote itself.

One final uncertainty concerns which states will participate in the elections. Three states were under a state of emergency (SOE) from May 2013 to November 2014: Adamawa, Yobe, and Borno, the epicenter of the Boko Haram uprising. It remains

¹⁰ See Carl LeVan and Amarachi Utah, "Nigeria's Electoral Laws as Harmonized by the National Assembly: 2006 and 2010 Compared," unpublished table, September 29, 2010, <http://carllevan.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Electoral-Law-Comparison-2010-final.pdf>.

¹¹ "Senate Passes Amendment to Electoral Act," *Premium Times*, July 3, 2014, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/164350-senate-passes-amendment-to-electoral-act.html>.

¹² "National Commissioners," Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria, http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=45.

¹³ "Nigerian Presidential Elections—2011 (Final)," Nigeria Elections Coalition, 2011, <http://nigeriaelections.org/presidential.php>.

¹⁴ Joe Nwankwo and Temidayo Akinsuyi, "INEC Commissioners Battle Jega Over 30,000 Polling Units," *Daily Independent*, November 10, 2014, <http://dailyindependentnig.com/2014/11/inec-commissioners-battle-jega-30000-polling-units/>.

¹⁵ For example, see Chioma Gabriel, "Permanent Voters' Cards, PVC: How INEC Failed Nigerians," *Vanguard*, November 15, 2014, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/11/permanent-voters-cards-pvchow-inec-failed-nigerians/>.

unclear how ongoing violence in these states will affect voting. In December 2013, Jega suggested that elections could not take place in the SOE-affected states¹⁶ but subsequently insisted that the vote would go forward everywhere.¹⁷ With Boko Haram attacking northeastern towns and villages almost daily, it may not be possible to conduct an inclusive and credible election in Borno and parts of Yobe and Adamawa. It also remains unclear whether and how INEC will enfranchise up to 1.5 million persons displaced by Boko Haram's violence.¹⁸

The Parties and the Candidates

The presidential election will primarily be a contest between two parties: the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and an opposition coalition called the All Progressives Congress (APC). The PDP has nominated incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, whose running mate will be incumbent Vice President Namadi Sambo. The APC has nominated former military ruler Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, who was the runner-up in the presidential elections of 2003, 2007, and 2011. Buhari's 2015 running mate is Yemi Osinbajo, a lawyer and professor who served as Lagos State attorney general and commissioner for justice from 1999 to 2007. Buhari, whom some Christians perceive as a northern Muslim sectional candidate, may have selected Osinbajo in part to counter that perception: Osinbajo is reportedly close to Pastor Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, one of the most influential Christian leaders in the country.¹⁹

The PDP

The PDP formed in 1998 as Nigeria began a transition to civilian rule. The party's original leadership included opponents of the military regime of Gen. Sani Abacha (ruled 1993–1998) such as former Vice President Alex Ekwueme (served 1979–1983), who became the PDP's founding chairman; former military ruler Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (served 1976–1979), who became the PDP's first presidential candidate and served as president from 1999 to 2007; and Atiku Abubakar, the PDP's first vice presidential candidate and a political protégé of Obasanjo's former second-in-command Gen. Shehu Yar'Adua (1943–1997), whose younger brother Umaru became the PDP's presidential candidate in 2007. Sometimes labeled a center-right party, the PDP often describes the private sector as the engine of economic growth but also

¹⁶ "No Elections in States under Emergency Rule—Jega," Channels TV, December 16, 2013, <http://www.channelstv.com/2013/12/16/no-elections-in-states-under-emergency-rule-jega/>.

¹⁷ Friday Olorok, "Elections Will Hold in Emergency Rule States—Jega," *Punch*, June 2, 2014, <http://www.punchng.com/news/elections-will-hold-in-emergency-rule-states-jega/>.

¹⁸ "Boko Haram Could 'Disenfranchise Nigeria Voters,'" BBC News, December 16, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30501381>.

¹⁹ "Buhari Calls Pastor Adeboye to Seek His Blessing before Announcing Osinbajo as Running Mate," *Sahara Reporters*, December 17, 2014, <http://saharareporters.com/2014/12/17/buhari-calls-pastor-adeboye-see-his-blessing-announcing-osinbajo-running-mate>.

emphasizes the importance of public-private partnerships.²⁰ The PDP won the presidential elections of 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011. Since the transition of 1998–1999 it has continuously controlled a plurality of state governorships, Senate seats, and, with a brief exception from December 2013 to February 2014, House seats.

Key figures within the PDP include:

- National Chairman Adamu Mu'azu, appointed January 2014. From Bauchi in the North East, he served as that state's governor from 1999 to 2007.
- Chairman of the Board of Trustees Anthony Anenih of Edo in the South South. Anenih was elected in February 2013, having served once before from 2003 to 2007. Anenih was minister of works and housing from 1999 to 2003. He is serving as national campaign adviser to Jonathan.
- President of the Senate David Mark, from Benue in the North Central. Mark was elected senator for Benue South in 1999, and became Senate president in 2007.

The APC

The APC was formed in February 2013 as a coalition of four opposition parties: the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and part of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The APC describes itself as a leftist, progressive party, although the party includes diverse geographical and political constituencies reflecting its founding parties' bases:

- The ACN's base was the South West. In 2011, even as South West states voted for Jonathan in the presidential contest, the ACN consolidated its control over all six governorships in the region.
- The ANPP and CPC had their base in the north. The ANPP has held governorships in North West states like Kano (2003–2011) and Zamfara (1999–2008, 2011–present) and North East states like Borno (1999–present) and Yobe (1999–present). The CPC broke away from the ANPP in 2009. Buhari ran on the ANPP ticket in 2003 and 2007, but switched to the CPC in 2011. The CPC captured one governor's seat in the North Central zone—Nassarawa—in 2011.
- The APGA's base is the South East, where it controls two governorships: Anambra and Imo. The Anambra APGA is aligned with the PDP. Imo Governor Rochas Okorocha leads the APGA faction that joined the APC.

²⁰ See People's Democratic Party Manifesto, 1998, <http://peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/manifesto-of-the-peoples-democratic-party.pdf>. See also Goodluck Jonathan, inauguration address, May 29, 2011, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/05/over-40-heads-of-state-witness-jonathans-inauguration-amid-tight-security/>.

After its formation, the APC scored defections from the PDP. Former Vice President Abubakar had already defected to the ACN in 2006 and became its candidate for his unsuccessful 2007 presidential bid (he placed third, scoring 7 percent of the official vote). Other APC defections capitalized on discontent with Jonathan and his perceived disruption of zoning (see below). In November 2013, five governors, four of them from the north, defected from the PDP to the APC:

- Abdulfatah Ahmed of Kwara (North Central)
- Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers (South South)
- Rabiu Kwankwaso of Kano (North West)
- Murtala Nyako of Adamawa (North East)
- Aliyu Wamakko of Sokoto (North West)

Numerous legislators, primarily from these states, followed suit: 37 representatives left the PDP for the APC in December 2013.²¹ These defections gave the APC a plurality in the House (roughly 174 APC members; 171 PDP members; and 15 other) until February 2014, when five APC representatives defected to the PDP.²² Nevertheless, in October 2014, Speaker of the House Aminu Tambuwal joined the APC. Senators have also joined the APC, including 11 who defected in January 2014.²³

In addition to these prominent defectors and the party's presidential ticket, important APC officials include:

- Former Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu, often seen as the party's unofficial leader
- National Chairman John Odigie Oyejuna
- Deputy National Chairman (North) Senator Lawal Shuaibu
- Deputy National Chairman (South) Segun Oni

Some PDP members did not defect to the APC, but have been fierce critics of Jonathan. One such critic is Obasanjo, who published a scathing 18-page open letter to Jonathan in December 2013, in which he accused the sitting president of failing to curb corruption, insecurity, and oil theft. At the end of his letter, Obasanjo alluded to

²¹ "37 PDP House of Reps Members Defect to APC," *This Day*, December 19, 2013, <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/37-pdp-house-of-reps-members-defect-to-apc/166933/>.

²² "PDP Back in Control of Federal House of Reps after Fresh Defections," *Sahara Reporters*, February 11, 2014, <http://saharareporters.com/2014/02/11/pdp-back-control-federal-house-reps-after-fresh-defections>.

²³ Festus Owete, "Why 11 PDP Senators Defected to APC, 5 More May Defect," *Premium Times*, January 29, 2014, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/154210-update-why-11-pdp-senators-defected-to-apc-5-more-may-defect.html>.

“concerns” with Jonathan among senior PDP leaders such as Ekwueme, former military ruler Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, and retired Gen. Theophilus Danjuma.²⁴

A Brief History of Fourth Republic Elections and Politics

Civilians ruled Nigeria at independence in 1960, but after two military coups in 1966, the country spent most of the period 1966–1999 under military rule. In 1998, following the death of Abacha, his successor Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar oversaw a transition to a civilian, multiparty system, the Fourth Republic. The transition was completed in 1999, when a new constitution came into effect and President Obasanjo took office.

Nigeria has held four national elections under the Fourth Republic. Domestic and international observers have generally considered the 1999 and 2011 elections more credible than the 2003 and 2007 contests.

Table 1. Nigerian Presidential Elections, 1999–2011

Year	Result	Estimated election-related deaths
1999	Olusegun Obasanjo (PDP), 62.78 percent; Olu Falae (Alliance for Democracy/All People’s Party), 37.22 percent	N/A
	Observer Comment (Carter Center/National Democratic Institute): "This transition from military to civilian rule was conducted generally without violence, and for that, Nigerians should be justifiably proud. However, the registration process and all four election rounds were marred, to varying degrees, by electoral irregularities, and sometimes, outright fraud." ²⁵	
2003	Olusegun Obasanjo (PDP), 61.94 percent; Muhammadu Buhari (ANPP), 32.19 percent	105 ²⁶
	Observer Comment (European Union): "The electoral preparations by INEC, and in particular the registration of voters, started too late and led to recurrent delays during the whole electoral process. . . . The elections in general were more peaceful than expected. . . . The Presidential and Gubernatorial elections were marred by serious irregularities and frauds. In a number of States the minimum standards for democratic elections were not met." ²⁷	
2007	Umaru Yar’Adua (PDP), 69.82 percent; Muhammadu Buhari (ANPP), 18.72 percent	300 ²⁸

²⁴ Olusegun Obasanjo, “A Letter of Appeal to President Goodluck Jonathan,” December 2, 2013, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/docs_download/OBJ-Letter.pdf.

²⁵ “Observing the 1998–99 Nigeria Elections: Final Report,” Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1999, pp. 8–9, <https://www.cartercenter.org/documents/1152.pdf>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Final Report,” European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria, 2003, pp. 1–2, <http://eeas.europa.eu/eucom/pdf/missions/nigeria2003.pdf>.

²⁸ “Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800,” Human Rights Watch, May 17, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/16/nigeria-post-election-violence-killed-800>.

	Observer Comment (European Union): "The 2007 State and Federal elections have fallen far short of international and regional standards for democratic elections. . . . The elections were marred by poor organisation, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud, particularly during the result collation process, voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, and lack of equal conditions for contestants. There were also numerous incidents of violence, although federal election day saw less violence than state election day." ²⁹	
2011	Goodluck Jonathan (PDP), 58.89 percent; Muhammadu Buhari (CPC), 31.98 percent	800 ³⁰
	Observer Comment (European Union): "The 2011 General Elections marked an important step towards strengthening democratic elections in Nigeria, but challenges remain. . . . The Presidential elections were conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly manner . . . INEC . . . managed to organise the 2011 elections guaranteeing overall effective exercise of voting rights to Nigerian citizens. . . . Regrettably, the Chairman's resolve to adhere to election regulations was not always supported by the performance of the remaining INEC structure. . . . Violence which broke out in many parts of the country before and after elections caused loss of lives and properties, and several thousand internally displaced persons." ³¹	

Table 2. Selected Gubernatorial By-Elections and Rerun Elections since 2011

State	Date	Winner (Party)	Official margin of victory
Adamawa (North East)	4-Feb-12	Murtala Nyako (PDP—defected to APC in 2013)	44.22 percent ³²
	Notes: After Nyako defected to the APC, Adamawa lawmakers impeached him in July 2014. His deputy governor, Bala Ngilari, who resigned but then won a court battle to clear the way for him to accept the governorship, became governor in October 2014 (as a member of the PDP). Ngilari will not run in 2015, and has pledged support for the PDP's candidate, former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission chairman and ACN presidential candidate Nuhu Ribadu.		
Bayelsa (South South)	11-Feb-12	Henry Dickson (PDP)	89 percent ³³
	Notes: In late 2011, incumbent PDP Governor Timipre Sylva was prevented from contesting the PDP gubernatorial primary in Bayelsa. Dickson, widely seen as President Jonathan's pick, won the primary and general elections.		

²⁹ "Press Release," European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria, April 23, 2007, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/nigeriapressrelease/nigeriapressrelease.pdf.

³⁰ "Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800," Human Rights Watch.

³¹ "Final Report," European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria, 2011, pp. 1–5, http://www.eucom.eu/files/dmfile/final-report-nigeria2011_en.pdf.

³² "Nyako Wins Adamawa Governorship Election," Channels TV, February 5, 2012, <http://www.channelstv.com/2012/02/05/nyako-wins-adamawa-governorship-election/>.

³³ Emmanuel Aziken et al, "Bayelsa: Dickson Wins as INEC Results Show Massive Turnout," *Vanguard*, February 13, 2012, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/02/bayelsa-dickson-wins-as-inec-results-show-massive-turnout/>.

Sokoto (North West)	18-Feb-12	Aliyu Wamakko (PDP—defected to APC in 2013)	71 percent ³⁴
	Notes: Sokoto will return to the regular election calendar for 2015. The APC's gubernatorial candidate is Speaker of the House of Representatives Aminu Tambuwal.		
Edo (South South)	14-Jul-12	Adams Oshiomhole (ACN—now APC)	74 percent ³⁵
	Notes: Edo's populist governor is a major figure within the APC.		
Anambra (South East)	16/30-Nov-13	Willie Obiano (APGA)	42 percent ³⁶
	Notes: This election was hard fought between the APC and the APGA, which many Nigerians saw as a proxy for the president (Jonathan and outgoing Governor Peter Obi were reportedly close). ³⁷ The first election was marred by irregularities, which prompted INEC to rerun the election two weeks later at some polling units. After the first election, one INEC official was arrested on suspicion of fraud		
Ekiti (South West)	21-Jun-14	Peter Fayose (PDP)	58 percent ³⁸
	Notes: Former Governor Fayose, who was impeached in 2006 on corruption charges, defeated incumbent APC Governor Kayode Fayemi. The election was seen as a triumph for the PDP's "politics of rice"—that is, its ability to win votes through populist rhetoric and direct, material appeals to voters—against Fayemi's model of 55 percent ³⁹ reformist governance, which had angered some constituencies such as schoolteachers. The APC's loss in its own territory was a blow to the momentum it had generated by wooing PDP defectors in 2013.		
Osun (South West)	9-Aug-14	Rauf Aregbesola (APC)	55 percent ⁴⁰
	Notes: Although the APC defended a state in its South West base, APC officials complained—as they had in Ekiti two months before—that the state security presence was overwhelming and intimidating.		

Four Key States

Lagos

Lagos is likely the most populous state in Nigeria, although the 2006 census estimated that Kano had a larger population (9.4 million, versus 9.1 million in Lagos).⁴¹ Lagos is

³⁴ "Wamakko Wins Sokoto Guber Election," *Daily Champion*, February 20, 2012, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201202210310.html>.

³⁵ "Oshiomhole Wins Edo Governorship Election," Channels TV, July 15, 2012, <http://www.channelstv.com/2012/07/15/oshiomhole-wins-edo-governorship-election/>.

³⁶ "APGA Candidate, Obiano Wins Anambra Elections," Channels TV, December 1, 2013, <http://www.channelstv.com/2013/12/01/apga-candidate-obiano-wins-anambra-elections/>.

³⁷ Habib Aruna and Daniel Kanu, "Guber poll: Presidency, PDP concede Anambra to APGA," *Daily Independent*, September 2013, <http://dailyindependentnig.com/2013/09/guber-poll-presidency-pdp-concede-anambra-to-apga/>.

³⁸ "Ekiti State Governorship Election, June 21, 2014—Summary of Results," INEC, <http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SUMMARY-EKITI-STATE-GOV-ELECTION-RESULT-1.pdf>.

³⁹ Niyi Akinnaso, "Why and How Aregbesola Won the Osun Election," *Punch*, August 12, 2014, <http://www.punchng.com/opinion/viewpoint/why-and-how-aregbesola-won-the-osun-election/>.

⁴⁰ Niyi Akinnaso, "Why and How Aregbesola Won the Osun Election," *Punch*, August 12, 2014, <http://www.punchng.com/opinion/viewpoint/why-and-how-aregbesola-won-the-osun-election/>.

also likely the most populous city in Africa, with an estimated 13–22 million people. An opposition stronghold since 1999, Lagos’s governors Bola Tinubu and Babatunde Fashola have won international praise for their governance model, which emphasizes tax collection and service delivery.

The APC, which (counting its predecessor, the ACN) has ruled Lagos since 1999, has selected Akinwunmi Ambode as its candidate for 2015. Ambode, an accountant and businessman, served in local government positions as treasurer and auditor in the 1980s and 1990s before becoming Lagos’s accountant general and auditor general from 2001 to 2012.⁴² Ambode has indicated that if elected, he will build on Tinubu’s and Fashola’s approach and will also make special efforts to develop the state’s informal sector.⁴³

Both Tinubu and Fashola are Muslims, and APC leaders seemed disposed to nominate a Christian candidate for 2015. APC leaders favored a Muslim running mate, and have selected Idiat Adebule, an educator with a background in Islamic Studies. She serves as secretary to the current state government.⁴⁴ Her presence on the ticket increases the likelihood that Ambode would represent continuity rather than change—it is unlikely that his administration would be sectarian.

The PDP has picked Jimi Agbaje, a pharmacist and relative political newcomer, as its candidate, with Safurat Abdulkareem, a businesswoman, teacher, and accountant, as his running mate.⁴⁵ Like the APC ticket, the PDP’s is Christian-Muslim. If the APC loses Lagos, it will be a tectonic shift for the state and the party. Despite the high stakes of the contest, however, Lagos is not widely seen as a potential hotspot for violence.

Kano

Kano is the most populous state in northern Nigeria and saw serious post-election riots in 2011. Kano has long-running internal rivalries. Since 1999, control has alternated between two men: Rabi'u Kwankwaso and Ibrahim Shekarau. Kwankwaso served from 1999 to 2003 as a PDP governor, then lost to the ANPP’s Shekarau, a former civil servant who built popularity through his image as an ardent champion of the implementation of shari’a (Islamic law, which was implemented in 12 northern

⁴¹ National Population Commission of Nigeria, “2006 Population and Housing Census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,” <http://www.population.gov.ng/images/Priority%20Tables%20Volume%20I-update.pdf>.

⁴² See his official biography at <http://akinwunmiambode.com/biography/>.

⁴³ “2015: Ambode Pledges to Take Lagos Next Level,” *Leadership*, December 30, 2014, <http://leadership.ng/news/politics/398675/2015-ambode-pledges-take-lagos-next-level>.

⁴⁴ Bola Badmus, “Lagos APC Picks Adebule as Ambode’s Running Mate,” *Nigerian Tribune*, December 18, 2014, <http://www.tribune.com.ng/news/news-headlines/item/24502-lagos-apc-picks-adebule-as-ambode-s-running-mate>.

⁴⁵ “Lagos 2015: PDP’s Jimi Agbaje Picks Running Mate,” *Premium Times*, December 28, 2014, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/173896-lagos-2015-pdps-jimi-agbaje-picks-running-mate.html>.

states between 1999 and 2001). After Shekarau served two terms, Kwankwaso returned to the office, again as the PDP candidate. In 2013, he was one of four northern PDP governors to defect to the APC—a move that prompted Shekarau, a founding member of the APC, to defect to the PDP and enter President Jonathan’s cabinet as minister of education.

The Kwankwaso-Shekarau rivalry will shape Kano’s 2015 gubernatorial election. The APC candidate is Kwankwaso’s deputy governor Abdullahi Ganduje.⁴⁶ The PDP candidate is Salihu Takai,⁴⁷ who served as commissioner for water resources and local government under Shekarau and who was Shekarau’s hand-picked nominee for the 2011 gubernatorial election.

Kano’s next governor will face major security challenges. Although Boko Haram’s most frequent violence has been in the North East, Kano has been a major target for the sect. Kano was the site of one of Boko Haram’s deadliest attack, a coordinated set of bombings and shootings in January 2012. Suspected Boko Haram members twice attempted to assassinate the previous emir. In November 2014, Boko Haram bombed Kano’s central mosque, an act quickly followed by a threat to assassinate the new emir, former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (also an outspoken critic of the Jonathan administration). Amid these security concerns, Kano’s next governor will also face the challenge of creating jobs, improving agriculture, expanding infrastructure, and increasing school enrollments in a region beset by poverty.

Rivers

Rivers is one of three core states in the Niger Delta; it is an economic prize for whichever party controls it, and a population center with geopolitical significance. Rivers’ capital is the Delta’s largest city, Port Harcourt. The state’s governor, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, was the only southerner among the five PDP governors who defected to the APC in 2013. Amaechi left the PDP because of conflicts with President Jonathan and First Lady Patience Jonathan; these conflicts came to a head when the president sought to block Amaechi’s election as chairman of the Nigerian Governors’ Forum in 2013. Jonathan hails from neighboring Bayelsa, while his wife is from Rivers. Until Amaechi’s defection, Bayelsa, Rivers, and nearby Delta State had been under PDP control since 1999. These three states were key to Jonathan’s victory in 2011, providing some of his highest margins of victory: 99.6 percent (Bayelsa), 98.6 percent

⁴⁶ “Ganduje Wins Kano APC Gubernatorial Primaries,” *Sahara Reporters*, December 5, 2014, <http://saharareporters.com/2014/12/05/ganduje-wins-kano-apc-gubernatorial-primaries>.

⁴⁷ “Takai Wins PDP Primaries, as Abacha Withdraws,” Channels TV, December 9, 2014, <http://www.channelstv.com/2014/12/09/takai-win-pdp-primaries-in-kano-as-abacha-withdraws/>.

(Delta), and 98 percent (Rivers).⁴⁸ The South South states will likely figure prominently in Jonathan's effort to win reelection.

Heading into the 2015 elections, the PDP has nominated Nyesom Wike, who most recently served as Jonathan's minister of state for education. Wike was Amaechi's chief of staff during his first gubernatorial term (2007–2011) and was director-general of Amaechi's 2011 reelection campaign. The APC's candidate is freshman Representative Dakuku Peterside, who represents Rivers' Andoni-Opobo-Nkoro constituency in the National Assembly. Peterside has experience in local government in Rivers, having served as commissioner for works under Amaechi (2007–2011).⁴⁹

Rivers could be a hotspot for violence in 2015.⁵⁰ The state has been a theater of violence in past elections.⁵¹ Amaechi's defection to the APC provoked attempts by the State House of Assembly to remove him. The crisis triggered protests for and against Amaechi, including a January 2014 rally at which police injured APC Senator Magnus Abe with rubber bullets.⁵² The redeployment of National Police Commissioner Joseph Mbu, whom Amaechi accused of being the first lady's ally, diminished tensions in the state, but the approach of the 2015 elections could renew tension and violence.

Plateau

Plateau State has remained in PDP hands since 1999. Outgoing Governor Jonah Jang, a former air commodore, has had a controversial tenure. Plateau has experienced recurring intercommunal clashes since 2001, which have claimed at least 4,000 lives.⁵³ These clashes have multiple causes and involve multiple identities.⁵⁴ Conflicts have involved, on one side, primarily Christian ethnic groups such as the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizeri, who are legally considered "indigenes" (natives of the state); and, on the other side, primarily Muslim Hausa "settlers" and nomadic Fulani pastoralists. Conflicts center on land, resources, belonging, identity, and access to political power, but religious rhetoric has sometimes overshadowed these other elements of the crisis. Many Muslim settlers see Jang as a partisan of the Christian indigenes. Jang is also

⁴⁸ "Nigerian Presidential Elections—2011 (Final)," Nigeria Elections Coalition, 2011, <http://nigeriaelections.org/presidential.php>.

⁴⁹ See his official biography here: <http://dakukupeterside.com/Biography/>.

⁵⁰ For details on local-level tensions in Rivers, see Fund for Peace, "Conflict Bulletin: Rivers State," July 2014, <http://library.fundforpeace.org/library/conflictbulletin-rivers-1407.pdf>.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, "Criminal Politics: Violence, 'Godfathers,' and Corruption in Nigeria," October 2007, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria1007webwcover_0.pdf.

⁵² Anayo Onukwugha and Ugochukwu Iroka, "Rivers Crisis: Police Shoot Senator Magnus Abe," *Leadership*, January 13, 2014, <http://leadership.ng/news/311634/rivers-crisis-police-shoot-senator-magnus-abe>.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: New Wave of Violence Leaves 200 Dead," January 27, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/01/27/nigeria-new-wave-violence-leaves-200-dead>.

⁵⁴ Adam Higazi, "The Jos Crisis: A Recurrent Nigerian Tragedy," Friedrich Ebert Stiftung discussion paper, January 2011, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/07812.pdf>. For details on local-level tensions in Plateau, see Fund for Peace, "Conflict Bulletin: Plateau State," October 2013, <http://library.fundforpeace.org/library/cungr1323-nigeriaconflictbulletin-plateau-10b.pdf>.

close to Jonathan. He was Jonathan's pick—and the ultimate winner—of the disputed 2013 election for leadership of the Nigerian Governors' Forum.

The PDP has nominated Senator Gyang Pwajok, who represents Plateau North, as its 2015 gubernatorial candidate. An academic and Berom community activist,⁵⁵ Pwajok served as Jang's director of research and chief of staff until 2012, when he ran for a Senate seat that became available on the death of the incumbent. Pwajok would likely represent continuity with Jang, who also hails from Plateau North.

The APC has selected Simon Lalong as its candidate. Lalong was former speaker of the State House of Assembly under Governor Joshua Dariye (served 1999 until 2006, when he was impeached on corruption charges). From Plateau South, Lalong may seek to benefit from discontent among voters who wish to see the governorship rotate among the state's senatorial districts.

The next governor of Plateau State will face not only the challenge of addressing the structural causes of intercommunal violence,⁵⁶ but also the problem of repeated bombings in the state, many of which have been claimed by Boko Haram. Bombings in Plateau have national resonance because many Nigerians, Muslims and Christians alike, feel that their coreligionists are under attack in the state—the bombings therefore exacerbate tensions across the country.

Conclusion

Nigeria's 2015 elections will feature a consequential and hard-fought battle for the presidency. The rematch between Jonathan and Buhari will test INEC's technical abilities as the Commission seeks to build on its gains from 2011. The rematch will also test Nigerian authorities' and voters' ability to avoid the violence that followed the 2011 vote. The winner of the election will lead Nigeria through a turbulent period, in which he will be pressured by Nigerians and the international community to end the Boko Haram crisis, redouble Nigeria's leadership in African affairs, and translate the country's economic growth into broad-based prosperity.

The elections will also include important contests for state offices. Governors' seats are open in populous and significant states. In Lagos, the next governor will face the challenge of building on the state's prosperity and gains in governance. In Kano, the winner will be pressed to secure the state against further attacks by Boko Haram, and to make the state a model for resolving the economic crisis of the densely populated but impoverished north. Rivers' next leader will have to navigate between local demands for a greater share of oil wealth on the one hand, and the constant attention

⁵⁵ See his official biography at: http://gyangpwajok.com/?page_id=6.

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (I): The Jos Crisis," December 17, 2012, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/nigeria/196-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-i-the-jos-crisis.aspx>.

of the central government on the other—a dilemma that may increase as the Niger Delta’s amnesty comes up for renewal or expiration in 2015. Finally, the winning candidate in Plateau will confront the grim legacy and ongoing challenge of recurring intercommunal conflicts. In these states and others, Nigeria’s new and continuing governors will play a major role in shaping their country’s trajectory for 2015–2019.

Appendix A: Biographies of Key Actors (in alphabetical order)

Abubakar, Atiku (b. 1946), from Adamawa in the North East, is a major APC leader. He was vice president of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007 and was the ACN's presidential candidate in 2007, when he placed third.

Amaechi, Rotimi (b. 1965) is the outgoing, term-limited governor of Rivers and the chairman of Buhari's reelection campaign.

Buhari, Muhammadu (b. 1942) is the APC's presidential candidate for 2015. A retired general, he led a bloodless military coup in 1983 and served as head of state until 1985. He was the second-place candidate in the presidential elections of 2003, 2007, and 2011. Between 1976 and 1999, he served in senior posts in the oil industry: federal commissioner for petroleum resources from 1976 to 1978, chairman of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation from 1978 to 1979, and executive chairman of the Petroleum Trust Fund from 1994 to 1999. He is from Katsina in the North West.

Fashola, Babatunde (b. 1963) is the outgoing, term-limited governor of Lagos. He is a major APC leader. An attorney by training, he served in Governor Bola Tinubu's cabinet between 1999 and 2007, including as chief of staff from 2002 to 2006.

Jega, Attahiru (b. 1957) has been chairman of INEC since 2010. A political scientist from Kebbi in the North West, Jega has served in senior positions such as president of the Academic Staff Union of Universities from 1988 to 1994, director of the Centre for Democratic Research and Training at Bayero University Kano (BUK) from 2000 to 2004, and vice chancellor of BUK from 2004 to 2010.

Jonathan, Goodluck (b. 1957) has been president of Nigeria since 2010. He is the PDP's presidential candidate for the 2015 elections. From Bayelsa in the South South, he holds a Ph.D. in zoology. He served as deputy governor of Bayelsa from 1999 to 2005, and then as governor from 2005 to 2007 after the impeachment of his predecessor. Chosen as the PDP's vice presidential candidate in 2007, Jonathan served in that role until 2010, when President Umaru Yar'Adua died from an illness. In 2011, Jonathan won reelection to a full term as president.

Kwankwaso, Rabi'u (b. 1956) is the outgoing, term-limited governor of Kano (North West) and a major APC leader. An engineer by training, Kwankwaso was Kano's first civilian governor under the Fourth Republic, serving from 1999 to 2003 as a member of the PDP. After his defeat in 2003, he served as minister of defense from 2003 to 2006. He won reelection to Kano's governorship in 2011 as the PDP candidate, but defected to the APC in 2013. He sought the APC presidential nomination for 2015 before withdrawing in favor of Buhari.

Obasanjo, Olusegun (b. 1937), from Ogun in the South West, was president from 1999 to 2007 and remains an influential figure in Nigerian politics. A retired general, he served as military ruler from 1976 to 1979 before voluntarily returning power to civilian leadership.

Osinbajo, Yemi (b. 1957), from Lagos in the South West, is the vice presidential candidate of the APC. He served as attorney general under Governor Bola Tinubu from 1999 to 2007.

Sanusi, Sanusi Lamido (b. 1961) is emir of Kano, one of Nigeria's most influential hereditary Muslim offices. He took the throne in June 2014 upon the death of his great-uncle Emir Ado Bayero (1930–2014, ruled 1963–2014). He was governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria from 2009 to 2014. President Jonathan suspended him in February 2014 after Sanusi alleged that billions had gone missing from the accounts of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.

Tambuwal, Aminu (b. 1966) is speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives and the APC gubernatorial candidate in Sokoto (North West) for 2015.

Tinubu, Bola (b. 1952) is widely considered the unofficial leader of the APC. He served as governor of Lagos from 1999 to 2007 and remains deeply involved in politics there and throughout the South West: his wife Oluremi won election to the Lagos Central senatorial seat in 2011.

Appendix B: Abbreviations

ACN—Action Congress of Nigeria

ANPP—All Nigeria People’s Party

APC—All Progressives Congress

APGA—All Progressives Grand Alliance

FCT—Federal Capital Territory

INEC—Independent National Electoral Commission

PDP—People’s Democratic Party

SOE—State of Emergency

About the Author

Alexander Thurston is a visiting assistant professor in the African Studies Program at Georgetown University. He received his Ph.D. in religious studies, with a focus on Muslim thought and activism in Nigeria, from Northwestern University in 2013. In 2013–2014, he held an International Affairs Fellowship with the Council on Foreign Relations; in that capacity, he worked at the U.S. Department of State as a desk officer for Nigeria. He has conducted field research in Nigeria and Senegal, and his writing has appeared in *African Affairs*, the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, *Islamic Africa*, and elsewhere.

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