

SPECIAL REPORT SERIES

OBSERVING THE  
1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

FINAL REPORT

The Carter Center

National Democratic Institute  
for International Affairs

SUMMER 1999

THE CARTER CENTER STRIVES TO RELIEVE SUFFERING BY  
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# OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

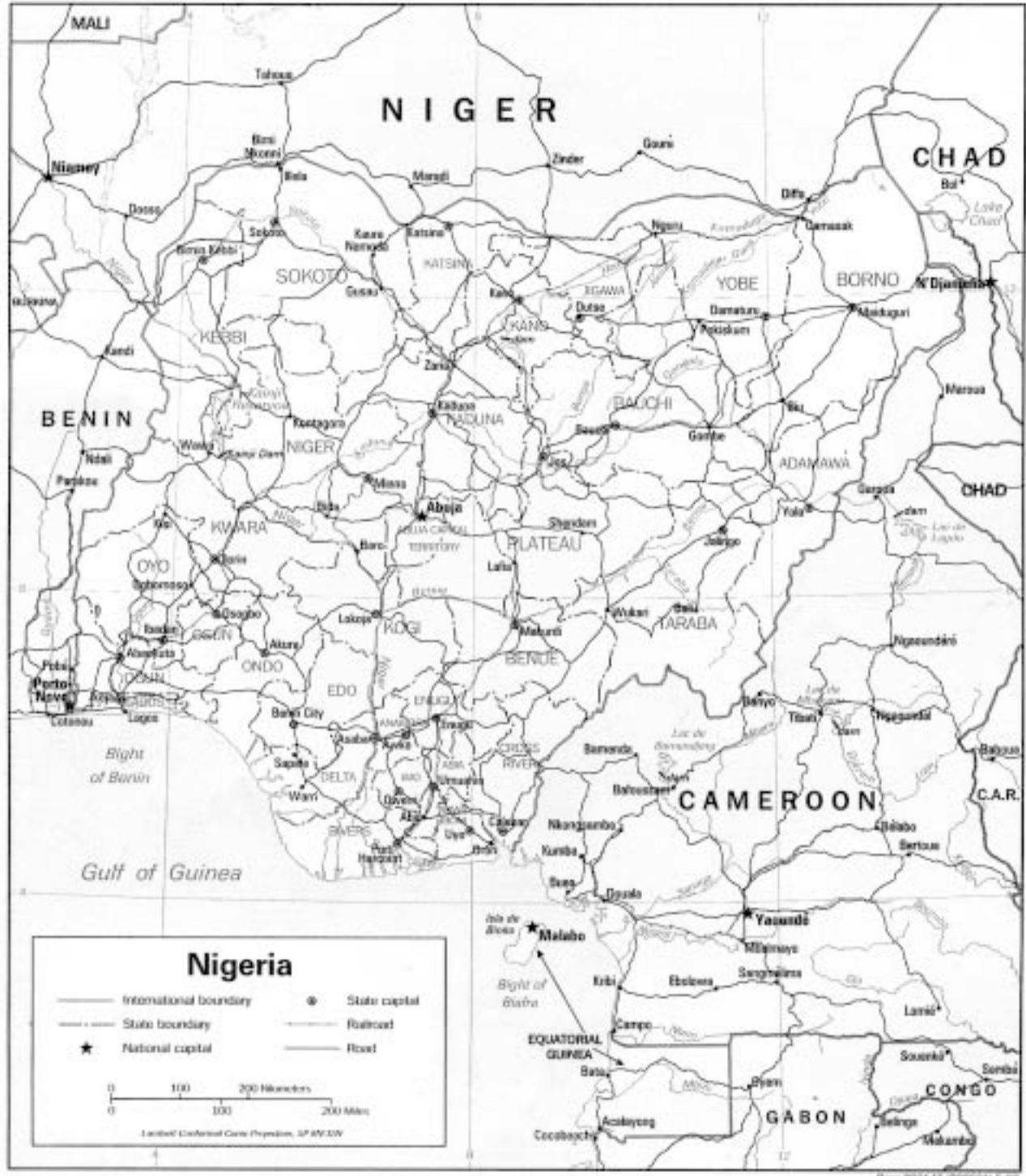
FINAL REPORT

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SOURCE: CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, USA, MAY 1993

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## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

# NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS DELEGATION AND STAFF LIST

Feb. 23 – March 1, 1999

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**The Honorable Mahamane Ousmane**, Former President of the Republic of Niger  
**General Colin Powell**, Former Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff

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EMMA SEMODEI

*Some of the 66-person NDI/Carter Center delegation gather in Abuja for dinner Feb. 28, 1999, the day after observing the Nigeria presidential election.*



## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Alliance for Democracy
APP	All People's Party
CDCC	Constitutional Debate Coordinating Committee
EU	European Union
IFES	International Foundation for Election Systems
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IRI	International Republican Institute
LGA	Local Government Area
NADECO	National Democratic Committee
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OAU	Organization for African Unity
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PRC	Provisional Ruling Council
TMG	Transition Monitoring Group
UN	United Nations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development



*The NDI/Carter Center leadership team meets with delegates to draft a statement during a debriefing in Abuja. From left, NDI President Kenneth Wollack; delegation co-leaders retired Gen. Colin Powell, Rosalynn and President Carter; and Carter Center Democracy Program Director Charles Costello. Not shown is delegation co-leader, former Niger President Mahamane Ousmane.*

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## FOREWORD

The importance of fostering democracy in Nigeria cannot be overstated. The most populous country in Africa, a dominant regional military and economic power, and one of the largest exporters of petroleum in the world, Nigeria is a nation of vast natural and human resources. It is also a nation of greatly unrealized potential, plagued for decades by financial mismanagement, widespread corruption, and explosive ethnic tensions. Successive military and civilian governments have plundered the public coffers and allowed the nation's infrastructure and productive capacity to fall apart.

After 15 straight years of military rule, which reached stifling levels of repression during Gen. Sani Abacha's five-year regime, Nigerians hungered for change. A fervent desire to elect a civilian president and live under a democratic system of government dominated the aspirations of nearly all Nigerians. This occurred with a brutal military dictator's passing, an enlightened leader's unexpected rise to power, and the Nigerian people's determination.

With Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar's rise to power following Gen. Abacha's death in June 1998, Nigeria's pace of political change has been remarkable. Before last summer, the prospects for a democratic opening seemed dim, with many political detainees languishing in prison and harsh limits placed on press freedoms and public expression. However, within weeks of Gen. Abubakar's accession, political parties were legalized, political prisoners were released, the press became unfettered, and a new timetable announced Nigeria's return to democratically elected civilian rule.

Seeing the potential for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to assist, The Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) responded positively to overtures from the Nigerian government, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and civil society

organizations. At the invitation of all key political figures in Nigeria, our two institutions organized election assessment and observation missions for each round of the transition process, including a 66-member international delegation to observe the Feb. 27 presidential election.

The Carter Center and NDI have a long and deep interest in Nigeria's welfare and in the region. The Carter Center maintains strong health and agriculture projects in the country, and NDI continues its work with newly elected officials, democratic institutions, and pro-democracy NGOs. We have a solid history of working together on joint election monitoring projects. Both institutions have experience in assessing political processes and observing elections, either separately or jointly, through numerous delegations around the world.

Nigeria presented various political and logistical challenges, perhaps greater than either organization had faced in its previous election monitoring efforts. For one, the country's desire to quickly replace the military with a civilian administration provided for a brief transition period – just four months from an October registration exercise through a series of four elections for local councilors and chairmen, state assemblymen and governors, National Assembly representatives, and the president. Complicating matters was the country's vast size and population, poor communications system, frequent fuel shortages, and run-down infrastructure.

The Feb. 27 election of retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, as the culmination of a political transition to install democratically elected civilian officials at all levels of government, represents a landmark opportunity for Nigeria. 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

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

varying degrees, by electoral irregularities, and sometimes, outright fraud. Both Nigerian civil society and the new government should explicitly commit to achieve electoral reforms before the next round of elections to remove this corrupting strain from the new Nigeria's political life.

We thank the delegates who participated in our missions for their contributions, especially the co-leaders who joined President Carter for the presidential election observation: former President of Niger Mahamane Ousmane and former Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Colin Powell. We also would like to thank Charles Costello of The Carter Center and Christopher Fumunyoh of NDI, who directed the Nigeria Project for their respective organizations.

We are especially grateful to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), whose generous funding made this initiative possible. We also appreciate the support from private donors who supplemented that funding.

An important positive development in these elections was the formation and commitment of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). This coalition of 64 Nigerian pro-democracy organizations fielded more than 10,000 domestic observers in all 36 states for the presidential election, providing perspective and the most comprehensive monitoring force for the election. TMG's membership and leadership crossed all ethnic, regional, and religious barriers, making it a truly national coalition. We are grateful to the TMG, as well as other local and international observer groups, for their level of cooperation during the transition process. These organizations' continued active participation in civic affairs will be critical to democratizing Nigerian society over the long term.

Although the efforts of election officials, observers, and others were crucial to the transition, the most important actors remain the people of Nigeria. The international community must stay

engaged as Nigerians move toward the democratic, transparent, and equitable society that so many have desired for so long. Given that the first step on this steep road toward democracy was a shaky one, commitment from all sectors is vital. Keeping true to this path will mean an improvement in the lives of millions of Nigerians and will serve as an inspiration throughout Africa and around the world. ■

President Jimmy Carter  
Chairman  
The Carter Center

Kenneth Wollack  
President  
NDI

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sudden death of military dictator Gen. Sani Abacha in June 1998 and the positive steps taken by his successor, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, raised hopes that Nigeria again might become a democratically elected civilian government. Nigeria's importance, coupled with its size, wealth, and political instability, prompted President Carter to call the ensuing elections "the most important in the world this year."

In fall 1998, NDI and The Carter Center sent separate teams to Nigeria to establish relationships with Nigerian democrats, assess their needs during the transition process, and determine what role the two organizations

might play in assisting Nigeria to foster democracy. Based on these trips and invitations from the Nigerian government, NDI

and The Carter Center agreed to design and implement projects to support Nigeria's democratic transition to civilian rule.

From the outset, NDI and The Carter Center recognized that most Nigerians viewed the transition process with guarded optimism. While many applauded Gen. Abubakar's intent to return the country to democratic rule, they knew he was part of Gen. Abacha's regime and the military was still firmly in control. Additional concerns included the absence of a national constitution to guide the elections, a flawed voter registration process, and campaigns largely devoid of issues or political platforms.

As a result, The Carter Center and NDI monitored the transition at all stages of the electoral process. They also continuously engaged Nigerian political leaders in discussions to gauge their commit-

ment to democracy, and identify and report on potential obstacles involved in a credible transition to civilian rule. The initiative's three primary goals were to:

- ✓ Assess the election process in the context of the broader political transition.
- ✓ Focus international and national attention on the transition's implementation.
- ✓ Lend the international community's support, encouragement, and technical assistance to Nigerians as they chose their leaders.

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*From the outset, NDI and The Carter Center recognized that most Nigerians viewed the transition process with guarded optimism.*

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Program activities centered on conducting small, high-level international electoral assessment missions to coincide with the Dec. 5, 1998, local elections; the Jan. 9, 1999, state

and gubernatorial elections; the Feb. 20 National Assembly elections; and a larger international observation mission for the Feb. 27 presidential election. Additional activities included organizing a joint trip to Nigeria, led by President Carter, in January during the middle of the transition; NDI's ongoing support to the TMG domestic monitors; and The Carter Center arranging for a media consultant to lead a workshop for journalists covering the elections.

For the Dec. 5 and Jan. 9 elections, delegates reported that polling was largely orderly and peaceful and most Nigerians they encountered felt the elections represented a positive step in the transition. However, the delegates also noted several clear shortcomings in the administration of both elections and recommended improvements.

From Jan. 18-23, President Carter led a mission to Nigeria to meet with Gen. Abubakar, potential

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JASON CALDER

*Representing Nigeria's future, these children pose on a street in Lagos.*

candidates, party agents, and others from a cross-section of society. The team also met with INEC Chairman Justice Ephraim Akpata, who, at President Carter's request, agreed to accredit thousands of additional TMG domestic observers for training by NDI to observe the next two election rounds.

While voting for the Feb. 20 National Assembly elections adhered to electoral regulations in many places, NDI/Carter Center delegates and observers from other organizations reported low voter turnout and serious irregularities nationwide. Abuses of the electoral process – including ballot stuffing, inflation of results, and voter intimidation – were widespread enough to question the elections' outcome in certain electoral districts.

The delegation recommended that INEC correct the situation immediately, and President Carter sent an open letter to INEC and the political parties stating his concern about the irregularities. These statements garnered considerable press atten-

tion, both in Nigeria and abroad, and underlined the potential for a problematic presidential election the following week.

For the Feb. 27 presidential election, The Carter Center and NDI organized a 66-member international delegation from 12 countries that observed 335 polling sites in 20 of Nigeria's 36 states. Members convened in the capital city of Abuja Feb. 28 and reviewed a preliminary statement developed from field reports. At a press conference that evening, President Carter read from that statement, in which the delegation noted positive election aspects and

irregularities.

National returns showed Gen. Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) winning the election by a margin of 18 million to 11 million votes over Chief Olu Falae of the joint Alliance for Democracy (AD)/All Peoples Party (APP). Based on alleged irregularities, Chief Falae immediately announced that the entire process had been "a farce." NDI/Carter Center delegate leaders met with Gen. Abubakar to share their concerns over the flawed electoral process. They later met with Chief Falae, who informed them that he was planning to appeal the results. After President Carter left Nigeria that night, retired Gen. Colin Powell and other delegates met with Gen. Obasanjo to discuss the election returns.

The delegates reconvened after the first press conference for more discussion and drafted a second statement for release the next morning, March 1. By then, the delegates had received more comprehen-

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sive reports from the field, analyzed data that the monitors had gathered, and compared the data to official results being reported from INEC. The delegation's second statement was more comprehensive and focused on irregularities in greater detail, including inflated vote returns, ballot box stuffing, altered results, and the disenfranchisement of voters.

Afterward, President Carter signed a letter on behalf of The Carter Center that was sent to INEC Chairman Akapata. It stated, "There was a wide disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling stations and the final results that have been reported from several states. Regrettably, therefore, it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election."

NDI and The Carter Center, as well as other organizations involved in the transition, made specific recommendations in their public statements designed to improve future elections. Summaries and complete texts of each of the NDI/Carter Center statements are in this report's appendices.

An election is not by itself sufficient to institutionalize democracy. A strong civil society, ongoing peace-building initiatives, protection of human rights, and transparent and effective governance are essential. The international community must do all it can to encourage the new government and opposition parties to work together to promote genuine democracy and inclusiveness and assist Nigeria in regaining its place as a leader in Africa and the rest of the world. NDI and The Carter Center intend to remain engaged in Nigeria to contribute to achievement of these objectives. ■



KARIN RYAN

*This Lagos man seems skeptical, as many Nigerians, about the military government's promise to hand over power.*

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## BACKGROUND: FROM BRUTAL REPRESSION TO OPEN ELECTIONS

A series of military coups, attempted coups, and failed efforts to establish democracy have marked Nigeria's political history. After gaining independence from Great Britain in 1960, the nation's military leaders ruled for 29 of its 39 years and throughout the last 15 years. (See Appendix A for a list of Nigerian heads of State.) While most of these rulers vowed to return power to the civilians, only Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo as a military head of state in the 1970s did as promised in 1979. Since then, a series of civilian and military administrations have squandered Nigeria's rich petroleum wealth and vast human potential. The situation reached its lowest point during the repressive regime of Gen. Sani Abacha, who had designs to prolong his dictatorship indefinitely.

The current transition program represents the culmination of a long and difficult process of political transition in Nigeria. It also represents the first step toward establishing sustainable democracy in a country that has yet to hold two successive presidential elections. To better understand the challenges facing Nigeria and the importance of these elections, it is necessary to examine earlier events.

### NIGERIA: PAST TO PRESENT<sup>1</sup>

Nigeria's dilemma has deep historical roots. Like most African states, Nigeria was an artificial creation of colonialism, including some 250 ethnic and linguistic groups, of which three –

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<sup>1</sup> Political consultant Dr. Peter Lewis of American University in Washington, D.C., contributed this historical overview, which was published in The Carter Center's 1997-98 *State of World Conflict Report*.

the northwestern Hausa-Fulani, southwestern Yoruba, and southeastern Igbo – became dominant rivals. The stresses of ethnic and regional competition led to political turbulence and civil war in the late 1960s, and these tensions have influenced the nation's politics in succeeding years. The quest for democratic government has occupied many leaders since 1966, when the military overthrew the first parliamentary government.

In the ensuing decades, military leaders have governed for all but four years. Nigeria's economy was transformed in the 1970s, when the country emerged as a leading oil exporter. Yet the new bounty did not bring prosperity or development. Instead, it signaled a massive increase in corruption and mismanagement, as civilian and military leaders struggled over control of the central government and its revenues.

These deep-seated challenges have been evident in recent crises. In June 1993, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's regime conducted presidential elections as the final step in a promised democratic transition. Although the poll yielded an apparent winner – Chief M.K.O. Abiola, a popular Yoruba businessman – Gen. Babangida annulled the election. He abdicated his eight-year reign, however, and installed a civilian caretaker government, which Gen. Abacha quickly shouldered aside.

### FROM ABACHA TO ABUBAKAR

The new regime harassed and detained journalists, human rights activists, politicians, and other dissidents or rivals. Chief Abiola was arrested along with dozens of government critics. In November 1995, the government executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight compatriots from the Ogoni community, who had agitated for

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

environmental standards and economic rights in the country's oil-producing areas. Many countries and international organizations condemned these executions and restricted aid and relations with Nigeria. Ultimately, the pall of political repression brought with it economic decline and deepening social strains.

The Abacha government sought to burnish its image by announcing political and economic reforms. Despite the promise of a new democratic transition agenda, the government permitted only five carefully screened parties to participate in elections and conducted the program in a repressive political atmosphere. In April 1998, all five parties nominated Gen. Abacha as their sole candidate for the presidency, leading many to denounce the transition as a manipulated exercise to preserve the military's power.

Political dissent and social tension gave rise to wider instability. Demonstrations and riots engulfed the major southwestern cities where Chief Abiola's base of support resided. Anti-government bombings alternated with anonymous shootings of opposition figures. In the southeastern oil-producing areas, the Ogoni and other ethnic minorities continued to press for equity and environmental improvements. In the northern cities, a dissident popular Islamic movement challenged traditional authorities. Two major coup attempts rocked the military, which was beset with factionalism, while rumors developed about other revolts.

On June 8, Gen. Abacha died suddenly, reportedly of a heart attack. Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar replaced him, quickly taking steps to reverse some of the most unpopular features of Gen. Abacha's rule. Several prominent political prisoners were released, the regime began a dialogue with the domestic opposition, and the country's diplomatic isolation eased.

Despite these hopeful steps, the country was thrown into turmoil when Chief Abiola died suddenly

on July 7, while still in detention. Official reports and an independent foreign-led autopsy attributed the death to a heart attack, but Chief Abiola's family and supporters bitterly criticized the military government. Rioting after Abiola's death claimed at least 60 lives. Within two weeks, Gen. Abubakar announced a new program for transition to democratic rule, set to conclude in May 1999. ■



## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## TRANSITION ISSUES

The pace of political change in Nigeria has been extremely rapid since the death of Gen. Abacha. Following his demise, Nigeria witnessed the legalization and creation of political parties, vast improvements in the level of press freedom and political competition, and the completion of four rounds of elections. The initial transition toward civilian rule, completed with Gen. Obasanjo's swearing in as president on May 29, took less than a year from when the transition began. Despite these and other generally positive developments, several issues surfaced during the transition process that caused serious concern and add to the challenges of building a democratic future in Nigeria.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK  
AND RULES OF THE GAME

Nigeria's transition occurred without a constitutional framework or a genuine public debate on the nation's constitutional future. Lacking a constitution, Nigerians cast their ballots without knowing what powers their elected representatives would have, how various levels or branches of government would interact, how the federal government and the states would share power, or even how long elected officials would serve in office.

Shortly after he assumed power in June 1998, Gen. Abubakar announced that a constitution would be publicized

before the December local elections. It was to be based on the 1995 constitution drafted under Gen. Abacha's regime and revised extensively by Gen. Abacha but never released from his administration. Gen. Abubakar later announced the appointment of the Constitutional Debate Coordinating Committee (CDCC) to organize public debate and recommend a new constitution. Gen. Abubakar hand picked the CDCC, which conducted all of its work behind closed doors.

In December, the CDCC recommended the adoption of the 1979 constitution with some amendments based on the 1995 draft. The 1979 constitution was created through a relatively transparent process during Gen. Obasanjo's regime, and many Nigerians viewed the CDCC's recommendation positively. The military government, however, never formally announced that the CDCC's recommendations would be implemented.



*Ballot boxes and materials await pickup at a distribution center in Nigeria.*

EMMA SIMONEI

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

Calls from civic organizations and political leaders to hold a public constitutional debate went unheeded by the military government. The government also dismissed urgings from leading pro- democracy and human rights groups to hold a Sovereign National Conference that would address the constitution and other political matters.

Throughout the election period, the military government relied on decrees and ad-hoc regulations to guide the transition process. In August 1998, Gen. Abubakar issued Decree No. 17, which established the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) to manage and oversee voter registration and four rounds of elections. Retired Justice Ephraim Akpata was selected to chair the Commission. (See Appendix B for the INEC-established Transition Timeline.)

Nationally, INEC developed a reputation for neutrality and fairness during the transition, despite its members being appointed without public input or scrutiny. At the state level, some of its officials were seen as partisan supporters of the military government or a given political party. Also, while INEC issued rules to guide the electoral process, it often released rules governing each round of elections just days before the vote, and never adequately addressed many important issues.

## VOTER REGISTRATION

INEC's first major task was to conduct a national voter registration exercise. Registration, held Oct. 5-19, 1998, had logistical problems that would hamper INEC's efforts at every subsequent stage of the election process. Shortages of materials, delays in the opening of registration centers, poorly trained officials, and attempts by political party agents to manipulate the process were among the many problems.

More significantly, the 57,369,560 people officially registered to vote exceeded reliable estimates

of the total number of eligible voters possible in Nigeria. In Kaduna State, for example, more than 97 percent of the total 3.9 million population, from the last national census conducted in 1991, supposedly registered to vote. Other states also registered highly questionable voter registration figures.

A poor registration exercise lay at the root of many subsequent problems during the transition and created opportunities for fraud. Even with the overriding interest among Nigerians to see the military leave power as soon as possible, many said that the transition process should have been postponed to conduct a credible registration of voters.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

To help prevent the formation of regional or ethnic-based political parties, an issue that has plagued Nigeria for decades, INEC established strict registration conditions. To compete in local elections, political parties were required to set up and maintain offices in 24 of the 36 states in Nigeria and demonstrate an ethnic and regional mix in each party's leadership. To continue the transition process, parties initially were required to obtain at least 10 percent of the vote in 24 states during local government elections. This figure later changed to 5 percent, with a caveat that at least three parties would advance to the later three rounds of elections. (See Appendix C for an Election Overview and a list of parties contesting the elections in each round.)

The INEC regulations, while well intended, set the stage for intense competition between parties to attract and retain prominent politicians, potential candidates, and financial backers, especially in parts of the country where support for the parties was weak. With no regulations for campaign finance, parties competed vigorously for wealthy, well-connected, and potentially dubious individuals to fund campaigns out of their own pockets.

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

Most of the parties formed hastily and further suffered from youth, inexperience, and a general lack of ideology. As a result, a complicated pattern of shifting allegiances emerged during the transition process. Meanwhile, the more established parties, such as the PDP and APP, drew on political machinery in place from past elections to give them a decided advantage in garnering financial and political support.

### CAMPAIGN AND ELECTORAL COMPETITION

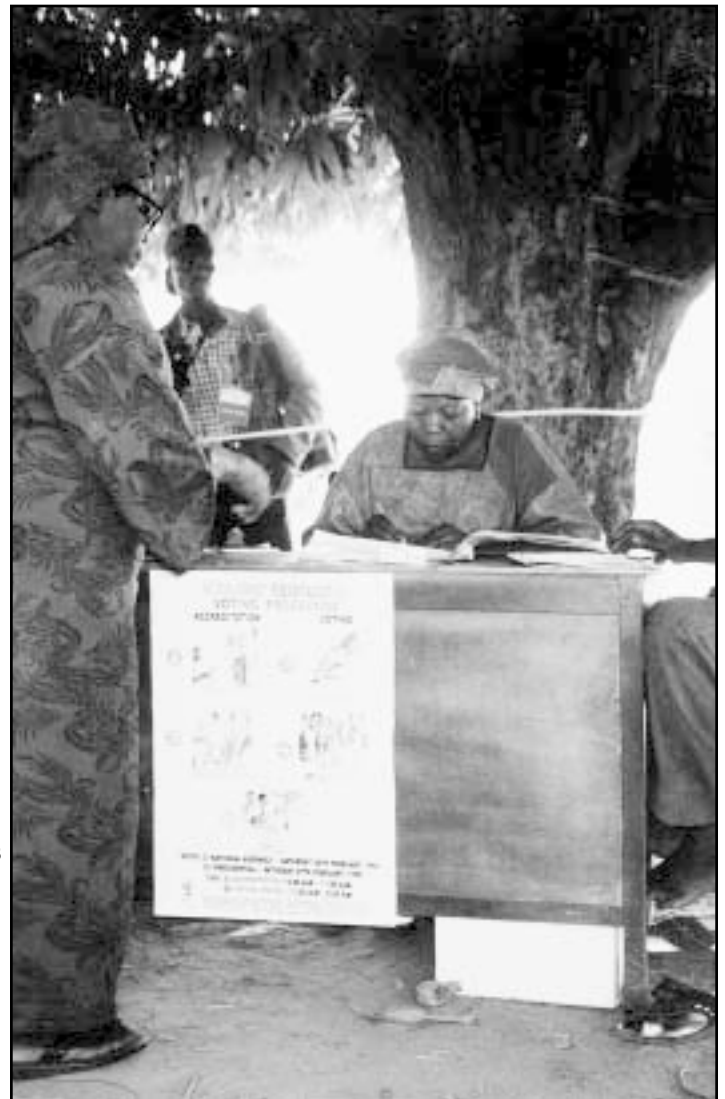
The only parties to qualify from the local elections – the AD, APP, and PDP – scrambled to absorb unsuccessful parties or co-opt their leaders and financial backers. Voters, already trying to decide among parties without clearly stated platforms, also were confronted with an INEC timetable that required parties to submit their candidates' names less than three weeks before each election.

Party primaries often occurred just days before the deadlines, so the selection of candidates, campaign period, and process of voting was often frenzied and confused. Adding to the confusion, INEC ballots did not include the candidates' names; only the party names and symbols appeared. Voters often went to the polls without knowing the name of their parties' candidate.

With parties and candidates largely keeping quiet about issues, "big money" politics shaped the transition, particularly in the latter voting rounds. Delegates heard about individuals bankrolling election campaigns and widespread instances of poll officials, party agents, and voters being bribed. In an environment of severe poverty, temptations abound for buying and selling votes. From the time of voter registration through each round of elections, NDI and Carter Center delegates and staff were repeatedly warned of the potential for fraud, rigging, and collusion during

the transition process.

President Carter's friendship with Gen. Obasanjo, who sits on The Carter Center's agriculture board and has been a member of The Carter Center's International Negotiation Network, also became an election issue when Gen. Obasanjo became a frontrunner in the presidential election. Early, false accusations that The Carter Center was supporting his campaign were firmly dispelled when the NDI/Carter Center delegation issued its statements on the elections. ■



*An INEC presiding officer registers voters who were aware of voting procedures posted nationwide.*

CATHERINE CLARKE

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## MONITORING THE ELECTIONS

**N**DI and The Carter Center have developed expertise in assessing political processes and observing elections through numerous election observation missions around the world. Although some international observation missions focus narrowly on election day events, the two organizations take a more comprehensive approach by assessing both the pre-election campaign period and the aftermath of the vote. The elections in Nigeria proved to be among the most challenging due to a restricted time for preparation and more than 110,000 polling sites throughout the country.

Given Nigeria's size and the limited number of polling stations that could be visited during the four elections, it was not feasible for NDI and Carter Center delegations to visit every state or most polling sites. Instead, each of the four missions had these objectives:

- ✓ Assess in an impartial and nonpartisan manner the evolving political environment.

- ✓ Draft reports on the local, state, National Assembly, and presidential elections.
- ✓ Show the international community's support for Nigeria's developing democratic process.

To achieve these objectives, NDI and The Carter Center worked together closely on all stages of the elections. Electoral assessment missions, which examined the political and electoral environment

during the initial stages of the transition, were conducted to coincide with the Dec. 5 local, Jan. 9 state, and Feb. 20 National Assembly elections. NDI assumed primary responsibility for international assessment missions around the time of the first two elections. The Carter Center then took the lead on the third electoral assessment mission and on the larger, international observer mission for the Feb. 27 presidential election. Through briefings, deployment plans, and



*NDI President Kenneth Wollack (left) and fellow delegate Charles Brumskine of Liberia discuss a point during a briefing session.*

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS



*President Carter (back to photo) observes a presiding officer as she explains voting procedures.*

EMMA SEIMONE

training on observation methodology, delegates were instructed on their roles and responsibilities as international observers.

### BRIEFINGS

For each electoral assessment or observation mission, delegates arrived in Lagos a few days before the actual election. The delegation spent a full day being briefed on the latest developments in the country. Nigerian civic and political party and civic leaders, INEC representatives, and TMG members gave presentations. Local journalists, international experts on Nigeria, and U.S. Embassy officials led additional briefings. Delegates also received site-specific security and logistics briefings by NDI and Carter Center staff members.

### DEPLOYMENT

Delegates were deployed in teams of two or three to sites nationwide for each election. They made efforts to cover all six electoral zones and as many states as possible. Within each state, delegates covered several wards and individual polling sites. By coordinating with TMG domestic observers and other international organizations' observers, they were able to gather information from a wide sampling of sites that included rural and urban areas and communities representative of Nigeria's many ethnic and religious groups.

NDI and Carter Center staff traveled throughout the country before each election to set up meetings for delegates and make logistical arrangements. Days immediately before the vote, delegates

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

attended meetings with candidates, local party officials, INEC representatives, journalists, and civic and traditional leaders. These meetings enabled the delegates to better assess the campaign period and overall political environment in a given area. Delegates used these interactions to assess the previous rounds of voting, the perception of the transition, the campaign process, and concerns of vote buying, intimidation, harassment, and violence.

This information helped delegates to determine which sites to visit on election day and provided important background for their assessment. During these meetings, delegates were told about such issues as voter apathy and fatigue, the candidates' lack of actual campaigning, and the prevalence of "big money" politics. These insights helped prepare the delegates for specific electoral irregularities many of them would observe on election day. (For an example of the deployment plan used for the presidential election observation, see Appendix H.)

## OBSERVATION METHODOLOGY

In selecting observation sites, The Carter Center and NDI consulted with international experts, representatives from each of the three parties, INEC, and other international observer organizations including IFES, IRI, the Commonwealth, and the United Nations. Consideration was also given to population centers, the six geo-political regions in the country, the electoral zones set up by INEC, and the strongholds of the various political parties.

Upon arriving at their sites, NDI/Carter Center delegates met with other international observers, TMG members, and domestic monitors to ensure that observers did not duplicate efforts. Observers from the various organizations usually met each evening to discuss plans and share their findings.

For each of the elections, delegates were asked to carefully document any irregularities, but not intervene in the electoral process. On election day,

delegate teams usually observed 10-20 polling sites, often revisiting some sites two or more times to fully assess the voting process or follow up on potentially suspicious or problematic developments. Delegates also followed the polling through each of the six stages to ensure the validity of reported results. These included accreditation, voting, counting, ward collation, Local Government Area collation, and state collation. Some delegates visited state INEC offices after the voting to share findings or met with INEC officials the morning after the election to gather results.

On election day, NDI and The Carter Center maintained call-in centers in Lagos (and Abuja for the presidential election) to receive interim reports from each of the teams in the field. Carter Center staff compiled the information from the teams and provided it to the delegation leaders. The day after each election, all delegates convened for a debriefing, in which they discussed their findings and drafted the election statements. They then presented these statements to INEC, the public, and in most cases, to the media during a press conference. (See Appendices D, E, F, K, and L for the NDI/Carter Center Statements.)

For the National Assembly and presidential elections, NDI/Carter Center observers used standardized checklists to record their findings. IFES and the United Nations designed them, in consultation with other international observer groups, designed them. The checklists covered each of the six stages of the polling process: (See Appendix O for samples of the Election Observation Checklists used for the National Assembly and presidential elections.) ■

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## NDI/CARTER CENTER ELECTION ACTIVITIES

## OCTOBER ASSESSMENT TRIPS

In October 1998, NDI and The Carter Center sent separate teams to Nigeria to establish relationships with Nigerian democrats and to assess their needs for the transition program. NDI sent three people for three weeks of meetings with a cross-section of Nigerian civic and political leaders. NDI identified potential partners for election-related activities. In particular, NDI met members of the then-nascent TMG, a coalition of pro-democracy NGOs, and began discussions on how NDI might assist the TMG in supplying domestic monitors for Nigeria's elections. (See Appendix N for more information on the TMG and its summary statement on the presidential election.)

The Carter Center sent a five-person team to Abuja and Lagos, from Oct. 11-16, to assess potential roles for President Carter and The Carter Center to play during Nigeria's transition to civilian rule. The delegation met Head of State Abubakar, INEC members, the leading political associations, media representatives, human rights and civil liberties organizations, conflict resolution specialists, members of the business and religious communities, and U.S. Embassy staff.

During these meetings, both teams recognized that most Nigerians viewed the transition with guarded optimism. Although unresolved constitutional issues and the conditions for political party registration established by the INEC were potential sources of contention, most Nigerians seemed willing to participate in the transition to ensure a quick end to military rule. Based on these trips and invitations from Head of State Abubakar, NDI and The Carter Center agreed to cooperate on designing and implementing projects to support Nigeria's democratic transition to civilian rule.

Both organizations identified more program areas where they might assist in democracy-building activities. NDI focused on providing technical assistance to the TMG and conducting domestic election monitoring activities. The Carter Center began exploring the possibility of longer-term initiatives in the areas of human rights, independent media, economic development, and conflict resolution in the troubled Niger Delta region. Both organizations opened offices in Nigeria to embark on these initiatives and prepare for the election assessment and observation missions.

When NDI first met with the TMG, it was a coalition of 12 human rights organizations based primarily in Lagos and other parts of southwestern Nigeria. While the TMG showed evidence of determined political will, it did not have the organization capacity or outreach to train and deploy a nationwide monitoring effort at that time.

## DEC. 5 LOCAL ELECTIONS

The first of four elections in the transition program began Dec. 5, 1998, with candidates from nine political parties vying for 8,811 councilor and council chair positions in 776 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Although INEC had not yet perfected the machinery for the local elections and controversy remained over the flawed registration process, these elections had considerable voter interest.

Many Nigerians expressed enthusiasm about the ability to choose representatives they hoped would be accessible, responsive, and able to work on pressing local problems. This enthusiasm, tinged

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

with skepticism among those that had witnessed and participated in previous failed transitions, also was motivated by the overriding desire of most Nigerians to end 15 years of military rule.

A joint NDI/Carter Center electoral assessment team, led by former Washington, D.C., Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly, with 11 delegates and eight staff members, including one delegate each from Ghana, Kenya, and Niger, visited Nigeria from Nov. 30 through Dec. 8. On election day, team members observed activities at 205 polling sites in six states. While there were isolated incidents of violence, the NDI/Carter Center team noted that the elections were generally peaceful and orderly.

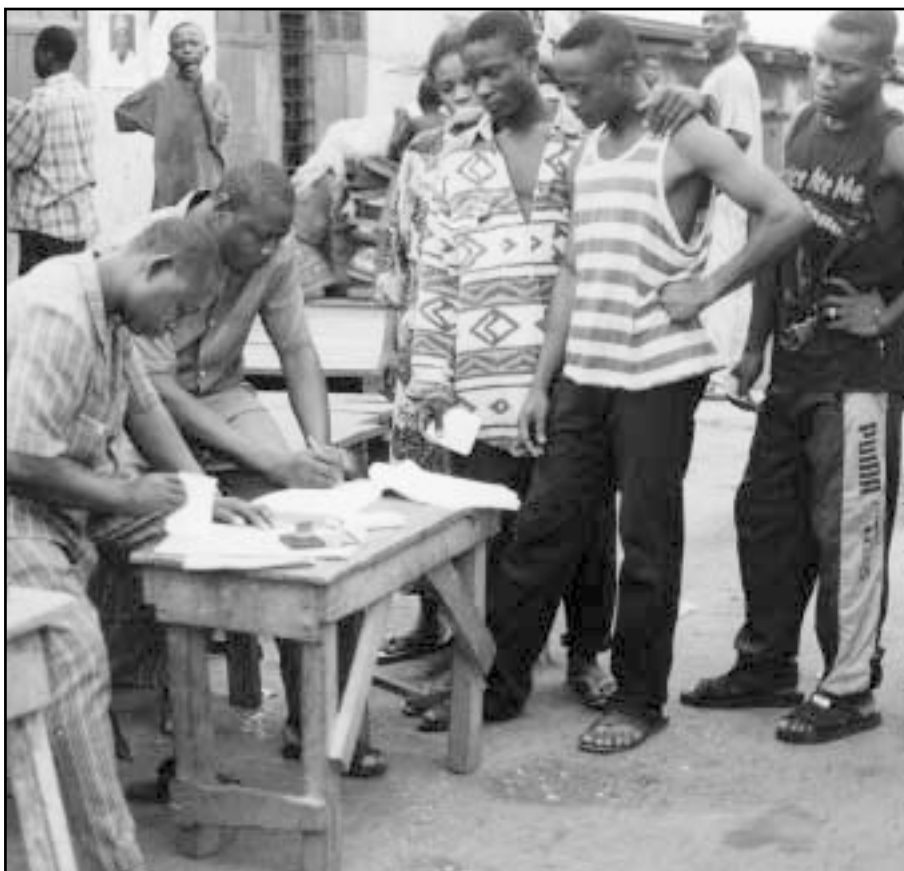
The team's report gave high marks to INEC officials at every level, but noted several shortcomings as well as electoral irregularities that would plague all four rounds of elections. Based on its observations, the team recommended improvements for subsequent rounds of voting. (See Appendix D for a complete list of delegates, their general observations, and their recommendations to INEC.)

Regarding voting procedures, many polls opened late and lacked necessary materials, and some poll officials appeared to be poorly trained or unwilling to follow INEC regulations. Accreditation and voting were often conducted simultaneously, instead of consecutively, as the election commission stipulated. Few polls had indelible ink to prevent multiple voting and the secrecy of the ballot was seldom maintained, with many voters marking their ballots in full view of poll

officials and other voters.

These procedural problems were witnessed throughout the country and during all four rounds of voting, but the team noted that such problems did not appear to greatly concern the voters. In most cases, this did not seriously compromise the integrity of the election process.

The delegation also noted more serious problems. For instance, the transition opened with no constitution in place, and the rules governing the

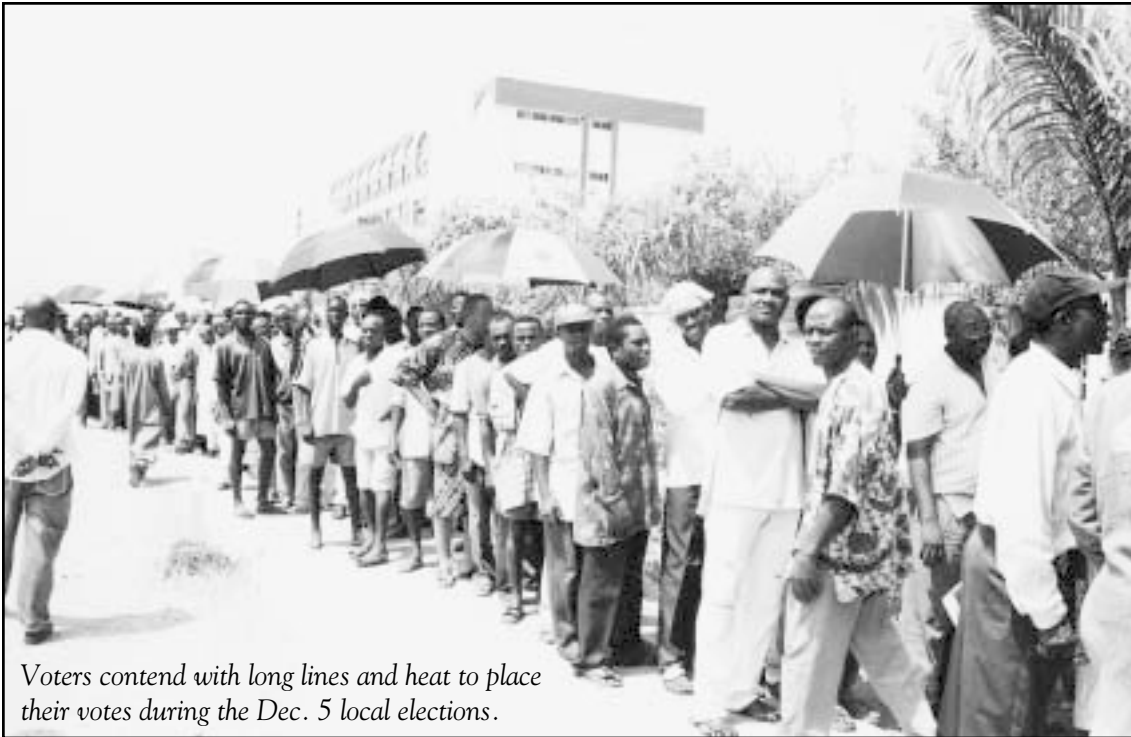


*Party agents at a Lagos poll watch as election officials tally votes.*

local elections were announced just days before voting. This development caused confusion and uncertainty among voters and candidates. Meanwhile, the local government elections were the first in Nigeria's history to be monitored by independent



## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS



*Voters contend with long lines and heat to place their votes during the Dec. 5 local elections.*

KIRK WOLCOTT

domestic observers, but INEC only granted credentials to 370 local observers.

The NDI/Carter Center team and other observers in the field estimated that only 20-30 percent of registered voters participated in the election, a cause for concern especially given that the official voter turnout was announced at 46.47 percent. As was the case in all four rounds of elections, our observers reported that the turnout of women was notably low.

When the polls closed, the PDP emerged as the clear winner, taking more than half the votes nationwide. Both the PDP and the APP captured more than 5 percent of the seats in at least 24 of the 36 states to advance to the subsequent rounds of elections, as stipulated by INEC. The AD, while winning 5 percent in only 12 states, also advanced under an INEC amendment. This amendment occurred days before the election, guaranteeing at least three parties would continue in the transition process. Although some of the parties charged

alleged incidents of intimidation, bribery of officials, and vote buying, most Nigerians appeared to accept the first round of elections as credible and expressed confidence in the transition.

## JAN. 9 STATE AND GOVERNORS ELECTIONS

A joint NDI/Carter Center election assessment delegation, led by former Congressman Harry Johnston, visited Nigeria from Jan. 5-12, 1999, to observe activities surrounding the elections for state assemblies and governors. The team of 12 delegates and additional staff, representing four countries, visited more than 100 polling sites in eight states on election day. Again, the team reported a generally peaceful and orderly election, low voter turnout, and procedural and other problems, to which it suggested a series of recommendations to improve the transition process.

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

*President and Mrs. Carter meet in Abuja with Head of State Abdulsalami Abubakar and his wife during a January pre-presidential election trip.*



EMMA SEIMOR

(See Appendix E for a complete list of delegates to the Jan. 9 elections, as well as their observations and recommendations to INEC.)

Several positive developments between the first two elections encouraged the team. Polling officials appeared to have learned from training sessions, security around polling stations had improved, and there was a noticeable increase in adherence to INEC voting procedures, at least in the limited number of sites observed. Still, many problems observed during the first round of elections persisted. These included logistical problems, such as delays in poll openings, missing voting materials, and a continued lack of ballot secrecy and indelible ink.

Fundamental problems in the broader context also concerned the team. INEC continued to limit the number of domestic observers, accrediting fewer than 800 of the 10,000 sought. Again, the NDI/Carter Center team and other observers noted a low voter turnout, estimated at roughly 25 percent of registered voters, while official INEC figures put the total at 52.67 percent. This matter raised

concerns of vote tally inflation that would become significant in the final two rounds of elections.

Results for the state elections showed the PDP emerging as the strongest of the three remaining parties, again capturing more than half the votes nationwide. Of the 35 gubernatorial seats contested, the PDP won 20, followed by the APP with nine, and the AD with six. The election in Bayelsa State, in the troubled Niger Delta region in the far south, was postponed due to violent clashes over the distribution of the state's oil wealth.

### PRESIDENT CARTER'S JANUARY VISIT

President Carter's first trip to Nigeria since the summer of 1997 came days after the state elections and a few weeks before the legislative and presidential elections. The purpose of this visit, planned for the mid-point of Nigeria's transition, was "to call international attention to Nigeria's courageous steps to form a democratic society," said President Carter.

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

From Jan. 18-23, President Carter led a delegation to learn firsthand about Nigeria's transition program and survey the ongoing election observation mission that NDI and The Carter Center mounted. Charles Costello, the Center's Democracy Program director, and Chris Fomunyoh, NDI's regional director for Central, East and West Africa, joined President Carter on this trip.

The group met in Abuja with Head of State Abubakar, and President Carter praised him for putting Nigeria firmly on track for a return to civilian democratic rule. The U.S. Embassy staff briefed the delegation in Abuja and Lagos. The group then met with officials and potential presi-

dential candidates from the three parties, as well as leaders from the media, religious groups, business, labor, and local NGOs. They also visited the National War College in Abuja to meet members of Nigeria's military and applaud their efforts at working toward peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In addition, they listened to six TMG members about the conduct of the first two phases of the elections.

In Abuja, the group met with INEC Chairman Akpata and 14 members of the Election Commission. President Carter questioned them on several matters, including the still-evolving electoral rules, requirements for selecting presidential candidates, poll workers' training, and the certification of domestic observers. At that point, only 800 of the TMG domestic observers had been accredited, and President Carter expressed his concern over INEC's seeming reluctance to accredit more observers. As a result of President Carter's intervention, INEC guaranteed that 10,000 TMG monitors would be accredited and, ultimately, more than 11,000 domestic observers received accreditation for Nigeria's presidential election.

## FEB. 20 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

In late January, AD became the first party to choose its presidential candidate when it selected Chief Olu Falae, a former finance minister and an ethnic Yoruba from the southwest. Meanwhile, AD and APP sought a merger in an effort to defeat the PDP.

*This woman, who is turning in her registration card, was among the relatively few women observed during each of the four elections in Nigeria.*



KARINE POUCHAIN

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

In early February, Justice Akpata ruled against the proposed alliance, stating that it ran contrary to Nigerian law and the Commission's guidelines, but added that nothing would prevent the AD and APP from fielding candidates on the same platform of one party. Both parties protested and even threatened to boycott the election.

At its February convention, the APP chose a little-known Ibo businessman, Ogbonnaya Onu, as its candidate. After heated discussions within the APP leadership and the AD, the two parties announced that Chief Falae would be the joint AD/APP candidate, running on the APP ticket. His running mate was northerner Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi from the APP. Meanwhile, the PDP selected as its standard-bearer Gen. Obasanjo, a Yoruba from the southwest, who defeated Dr. Alex Ekwueme, an Ibo from the southeast, who had been vice president under Nigeria's last civilian govern-

ment. Alhaji Abubakar Atiku, a northerner, was chosen as the PDP vice presidential candidate.

Weeks of intense jockeying and deal making, coupled with the highly publicized presidential primaries and the decision of AD and APP to field a single presidential candidate, dominated politics in the days leading up to the National Assembly elections. Consequently, the parties did very little actual campaigning and most Nigerians did not know until election day the candidates for the Senate or House of Representatives, nor see much importance in these National Assembly races.

On election day, The Carter Center and NDI fielded a 20-person team that visited more than 150 polling sites in nine states and Abuja. Voter turnout again appeared to international and domestic observers to be quite low, with no more than 20 percent and at some polling sites less than 5 percent of the registered voters on average. Meanwhile, INEC



CATHERINE CLARKE

*An INEC presiding officer checks the registration list to certify each voter's eligibility.*

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS



GILLIAN FLIES

*Retired Gen. Colin Powell (center) discusses voting procedures with a presiding officer in Lagos, as other NDI/Carter Center observers and party agents look on.*

reported an official count of 43.84 percent, one of the many discrepancies that the NDI/Carter Center team and other observers in the field noted. (See Appendix F for the National Assembly election delegates list and their recommendations.)

While voting in many places followed electoral regulations, the NDI/Carter Center delegates witnessed several serious irregularities countrywide. The delegation reported that abuses of the electoral process – including ballot stuffing, inflation of results, and outright intimidation – were widespread enough to question the outcome of elections in certain constituencies and senatorial districts.

The delegation recommended that INEC take immediate corrective action, and President Carter sent an open letter to INEC stating his concern about the irregularities. He also sent letters to the political parties, calling on both presidential candidates to address these problems. (See Appendix M for

a copy of President Carter's letter.)

## FEB. 27 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

For the presidential election, NDI and The Carter Center organized a 66-member international delegation led by President Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, former President of Niger Mahamane Ousmane, and retired U.S. General Colin Powell. The team included elected officials, political leaders, and regional and election experts from 10 countries in Africa, Asia, and North America.

After meeting in Lagos on Feb. 24 for extensive briefings, the delegates were deployed in two- and three-member teams for additional meetings with INEC officials, party representatives, and others in 20 states plus the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. On

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

Saturday, election day, the NDI/Carter Center observation team visited 335 polling stations in 112 wards and in 61 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Delegates also observed the collation process at 33 wards, 20 LGAs, and six states.

National returns showed Gen. Obasanjo and the PDP winning the election by a margin of 18 million votes to 11 million votes for Chief Falae and the AD/APP alliance. Obasanjo gained the majority of the vote in 27 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Falae won the majority in nine states, including all six in the Southwest zone. (See Appendix J for final results of the presidential election.)

The day after the election, all delegates convened in Abuja for a debriefing and to meet with the leadership team. The delegation reviewed a preliminary statement that had been developed from call-in reports by the observation teams in the field. President Carter, President Ousmane, Gen. Powell, Ken Wollack, and Charles Costello held a press conference late that afternoon to release the preliminary statement.

## PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT AND POST-ELECTION OBSERVATIONS

In its preliminary statement, the delegation noted several positive aspects of the election, including the campaign's peaceful nature and voting processes and an adherence to INEC regulations in many areas nationwide. The delegation also noted several serious electoral irregularities and overt fraud in many states. (See Appendix K for a copy of the preliminary statement on the presidential elections.)

Among those who witnessed electoral abnormalities in person was President Carter, who saw a stack of ballots neatly placed in one ballot box in precise numerical order. Several other delegates observed instances of ballot box stuffing, including visiting polling sites where INEC officials or party agents illegally printed multiple ballots with their own thumbs. In at least nine states, particularly in the South-South zone, NDI/Carter Center delegates observed voter turnouts that were

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*National returns showed Gen. Obasanjo and the PDP winning the election ...*

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*President Carter closely examines voting records during the presidential election.*



EMMA SEIMODEI

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

significantly lower than the official tally.

In some states, delegates estimated that less than 10 percent of registered voters cast ballots, but official turnout rates for those same states exceeded 85 percent. Many individual polling sites recorded that all 500 registered voters had cast ballots when the NDI/Carter Center delegation and other observers saw fewer than 100 people there during the day.

Another significant development that the delegation reported was the altering of results. In many instances, NDI/Carter Center observers recorded low numbers of accredited voters at polling stations, sometimes less than 10 percent of those registered. During the counting and/or the collation process later in the day, however, they found that these same polling stations reported considerably higher numbers, sometimes even 100 percent of the registered voters.

Usually the votes at these polling stations were mainly or entirely for a single party. At many polling stations where the delegates observed these irregularities, it appeared that the party agents and polling officials were involved in the malpractice.

On Sunday, Feb. 28, delegates gathered in Abuja to discuss findings, draft a preliminary statement, and hold a press conference. The delegation co-leaders including President Carter, Gen. Powell, and President Ousmane met privately with Head of State Abubakar to discuss the delegation's initial findings and share some of their concerns about the electoral process.

By late Sunday afternoon, the group had gathered preliminary results and held its first press conference. The delegation concluded its first statement with the



Mrs. Carter shakes hands following observations in Kaffi. While at this time the delegation has no evidence indicating that the electoral abuses would have affected the overall outcome of the election, they nevertheless compromised the integrity of the process in the areas where they occurred."

After the press conference, President and Mrs. Carter returned to the U.S., while the remainder of the delegates reconvened for further debriefing. During the course of the evening, official election results began being reported. These results showed the extent to which electoral abuses played a role in the elections. One of the delegation's main concerns was the disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling sites on the day of the election and INEC's reported high turnout. Whereas most delegates reported less than 20 percent of registered voters at the sites visited and rarely more than 50 percent turnout at any site, INEC reported a total voter turnout of 52.13 across the country and eight states with 70 percent or higher turnout.

Although delegates were suspicious of voter tally inflation from the earlier state and local elections,

EMMA SENCIBEL

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

more firsthand evidence of electoral irregularities and fraud from the legislative and presidential elections prompted them to emphasize the inflated vote tallies in these later reports. In addition, the increased number of international and domestic observers for the presidential election helped confirm earlier suspicions that this practice was indeed widespread.

Concerned with the results from the delegation's findings, Gen. Powell and other delegates met with Gen. Obasanjo late Sunday evening, and with Chief Falae early Monday morning to discuss the group's findings and alert the candidates of an early morning press conference. Chief Falae announced that the entire process had been "a farce" and informed the delegation that he was planning to appeal the results. The NDI/Carter Center co-leaders urged Chief Falae to take his appeal through the court system rather than to the streets, and he agreed to adhere to the INEC-specified legal route.

On Monday, March 1, the delegation released its second statement and held a second press conference focused on electoral irregularities in greater detail, and the wide disparity between what was observed and what the INEC officially reported. The second statement did not contradict the preliminary statement, as was alleged by some.

After more election returns arrived, President Carter sent a letter to INEC Chairman Akpata. (See Appendix L for NDI/Carter Center Statement on the



*After all votes have been cast, a presiding officer empties the ballots to begin counting.*

KARINE POUCHAIN

presidential election and Appendix M for President Carter's letter to INEC.) It stated:

"There was a wide disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling stations and the final results that have been reported from several states. Regrettably, therefore it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election."



## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## POST-ELECTION OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout Nigeria's transition process, NDI and The Carter Center stressed that their comprehensive role stretched beyond merely watching the voting process. Therefore, both organizations undertook assessment missions well before the first round of elections and established offices in Abuja and Lagos. One of their objectives was to explore potential longer-term activities to continue fostering democracy in Nigeria after the elections.

At the conclusion of the elections, NDI assessed the political climate and determined that its post-election work would focus on:

- ✓ Assisting newly elected officials at the state level.
- ✓ Providing ongoing assistance to civil society with the National Assembly committee system.
- ✓ Aiding civil-military relations programming.

Maintaining offices in Lagos and Abuja, NDI held its first post-election program in April, convening the 36 governors-elect for a national Governors' Forum. The forum provided the governors a chance to share ideas, discuss policy, and build nonpartisan relationships. NDI sponsored a post-election conference for

the Transition Monitoring Group in May, where TMG members discussed their future role in Nigeria's new dispensation. Later this year, NDI will work with the National Assembly and civil-military programming and continue to work with state governors and civil society at large.

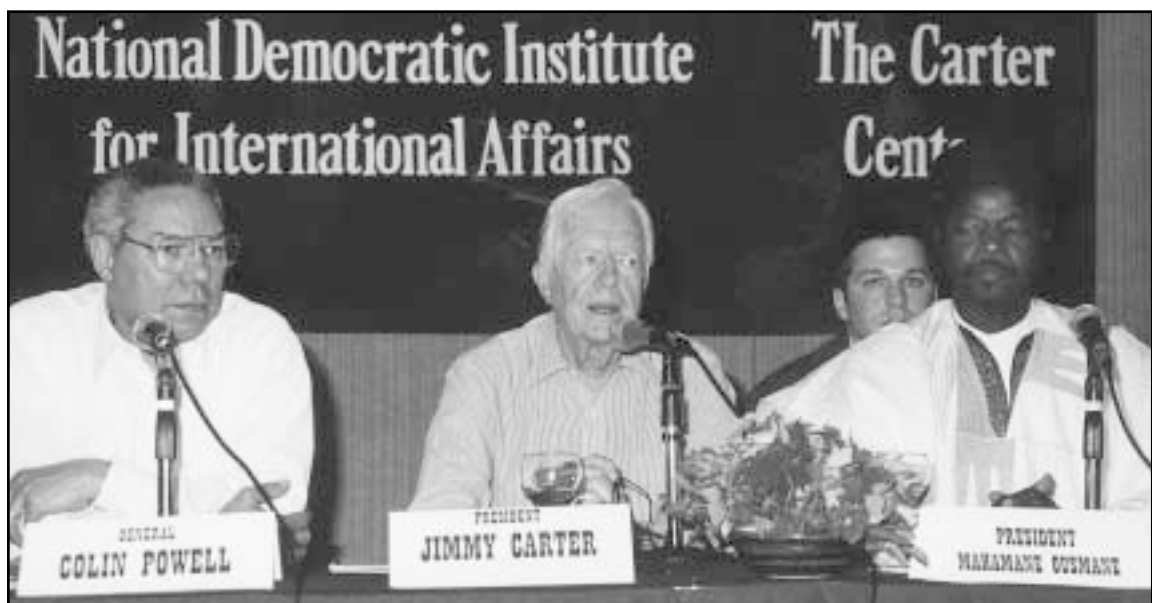
The Carter Center, in addition to its ongoing agriculture and health programs in Nigeria, identified potential longer-term projects. Based on a series of meetings during the transition, The Carter Center planned to pursue the following:

- ✓ Explore a role in facilitating consensus for a strategy on economic reform, with special emphasis on anti-corruption efforts and transparency in the privatization process.

- ✓ With approval from the incoming government, seek ways to help resolve tensions and promote sustainable development in the troubled Niger Delta region, building on President Carter's January meeting with representatives from minority communities there.

- ✓ Via meetings with key human rights actors in Nigeria, The Carter Center would like to help promote rule of law, provide technical assistance for police and judicial officials, and strengthen the National Human Rights Commission. ■

(l-r) Gen. Powell, President Carter, and President Ousmane speak at a Feb. 28 press conference in Abuja. Tim McCoy, an NDI senior program officer and interpreter, is in the background.



EMMA SHIMODEI

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria's elections and transfer of power from a military regime to a civilian government mark historic steps for the country. The 1998-99 transition remains, however, just one step in a longer process of democratization that will require continued commitment from all sectors of Nigerian society. While the international community has an important role to play in supporting this democracy, it is ultimately the people of Nigeria who must determine the legitimacy of this and future elections in the country.

Nigeria deserves credit for the giant strides it has taken so far. Commendable are the actions of Gen. Abubakar, Justice Akpata, many of the INEC and party officials who adhered to

the election guidelines, security officers, local government officials, and the Nigerian voting public who contributed to the transition process under extremely tight time restrictions and against formidable challenges. To all of their credit, the elections proceeded on time, with limited disruption or incidences of violence, and achieved their primary goal of transferring power.

However, this transition process fell short of its democratic objectives. Electoral irregularities, including fraud and vote rigging, that our observers and others in the field witnessed are cause for serious concern. Especially disconcerting were the inflated voter returns and altered results in many states. These instances not only call into question the integrity of the overall election process, but also

the legitimacy of those elected and their ability to govern.

From the onset, a compressed timetable and top-down structure controlled by the very military officials it intended to replace affected the process. Whether the transition should have been given more time immediately after a registration exercise that was, by most accounts, seriously flawed, became a topic of some considerable debate. Whether voting in specific areas should have been canceled and held again also became a question

that cast doubt on the legitimacy of the process. Although these questions are less relevant now that the elections are over and a new administration is poised to

govern, they remain serious for Nigeria's future.

Throughout the transition, Nigerians feared that the military would renege on its promises and hold onto power. This fear created a tendency to overlook imperfections in the process so as not to give the generals a pretext to halt or reverse the transition or annul the election results as was done after the last presidential race in 1993. This tendency may be understandable given Nigeria's past, but it should not be an excuse to ignore the problems in the electoral process.

Many positive signs during the four elections encouraged The Carter Center, NDI, and our delegates. Foremost were Gen. Abubakar's commitment to seeing the transition process from start to finish; INEC's dedication and credibility, especially

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*“While the international community has an important role to play in supporting this democracy, it is ultimately the people of Nigeria who must determine the legitimacy of this and future elections in the country.”*

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## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

at the national and state levels; and the determination and courageous efforts made by NGO members, the independent press, women's groups, and many others. A vibrant civil society, that continues to build on the democratic foundations now in place and serves as a watchdog against future governmental or military repression, is critical.

In the end, the role of both international and domestic observers is to watch and report, not to judge or investigate. Challenges to the political process should begin with parties working through the established legal system. Ultimately, political change depends on the standing government, the incoming administration, opposition parties, and the will of the people. Nonetheless, we, as observers, can offer some recommendations based on our observations during this transition and on past initiatives in which our organizations were involved.

Specific recommendations for improving elections and developing democracy in Nigeria are located at the end of each of the five statements in the appendices to this report. We encourage Nigerians and the wider international community to consider them carefully, particularly focusing on the following:

- ✓ Promote and strengthen strict enforcement of Nigeria's electoral laws and regulations, based on a just and representative constitution, to prevent fraud and increase confidence in democratic institutions and processes.

- ✓ Ensure that ruling and opposition parties work cooperatively to establish common rules of democratic conduct.

- ✓ Support local nongovernmental organizations and other civic-minded groups to play a watchdog role in safeguarding democracy.

- ✓ Emphasize federalism and local government authority and provide for a reinvigorated judiciary

to maintain the rule of law.

- ✓ Integrate the military into a democratic society and develop the mechanisms and knowledge among civilian leaders to oversee and manage security affairs.

For democracy truly to take root, Nigeria must promote more effective systems of checks and balances among its government institutions, safeguard human rights and liberties at all levels of society, and guarantee public accountability. The international community must do all it can to encourage the new government, opposition parties, and the public to work together to promote genuine democracy. NDI and The Carter Center intend to continue assisting in these areas to help Nigeria achieve its great potential as a leading democratic African nation. ■

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



*Carter Center and NDI staff, consultants, interns, and local personnel pose with President and Mrs. Carter following the presidential election press conference in Abuja.*

The Carter Center and NDI are grateful to the delegates, partners, and staff who made this project possible. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided funding support for the Nigeria Project through a direct grant to NDI, which then provided a subgrant to The Carter Center. Throughout the process, NDI and The Carter Center worked closely with USAID personnel and deeply appreciate their collaboration and contributions to Nigeria's transition. Felix Awantang, Denise Dauphinais, Sylvia Fletcher, Jerry Hyman, Donald Krumm, Katherine Nichols, Dana Peterson, and other USAID officials demonstrated professionalism and good humor and made our work in Nigeria possible.

Several U.S. Department of State officials provided support to the NDI/Carter Center team. In Lagos, these included Ambassador William

Twadell, Deputy Chief of Mission Nancy Serpa, and Political Counselor Jim Young, who helped arrange President Carter's trip and meetings in the Niger Delta and supported our operations throughout the election period. Pat Patterson, Embassy principal officer in Abuja, greatly assisted our field staff. In Washington, D.C., Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering and Nigeria Desk Officer David Abel, among others, supported our efforts and responded to our requests throughout the transition.

The elections could not have occurred without the work of several key actors, especially INEC Chairman Justice Ephraim Akpata. Operating under difficult conditions and strict time pressures, INEC administered the process with confidence. Several organizations greatly assisted INEC, such as the United Nations, European Union, Commonwealth, Organization for African Unity, as well as

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

individual governments and many NGOs, including the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). We thank each for their assistance and cooperation.

Also critical to the elections' success was the Transition Monitoring Group. Courageous and tireless individuals led the TMG, committed to ensuring that the elections were held according to international standards and that they were observed and monitored, for the first time in Nigeria's history, by trained Nigerians. Special thanks goes to TMG's Chairman Clement Nwankwo, its Secretariat staff, and its Coordinating Committee members.

In addition, we recognize Nigeria expert Dr. Peter Lewis of American University and his valuable contribution as primary consultant to The Carter Center. Special thanks also go to Susan Palmer of the IFES, for many years on The Carter Center staff, who provided important technical insights and political information.

We commend the NDI and Carter Center in-country staff for an outstanding job in organizing the election-related missions to Nigeria. For NDI, these included Field Office Director Jerry Henderson and Political Consultant Shari Bryan, who logged months of tireless work under stressful conditions. Assisting them were Logistics Coordinator Michael Thayer and Office Manager Eric Happel. Critical to NDI's operation were Dr. Balfour Ageyman-Duah and Smydge Perry, who worked directly with TMG and its members for more than four months. Their training and technical assistance contributed greatly to TMG's success.

For The Carter Center, Field Office Director Robert LaGamma and Associate Field Office Director/Logistics Manager Gillian Flies were instrumental, including arranging President Carter's January visit on short notice and overseeing the challenging presidential election observation mission. Assisting them were Consultant Brent Preston, Logistics Assistant Curtis Majekendomi, and

again Michael Thayer, who provided logistical support for The Carter Center.

In Washington, D.C., Dr. Christopher Fomunyoh, Regional Director for Central, East and West Africa led NDI operations. Additional staff that contributed greatly to the Nigeria program included Vice President for Program Tom Melia, Senior Associates Peter Manikas and Pat Merloe, and a hard-working team including Vernice Guthrie, Ryan McCannell, Kym McCarty, Tim McCoy, Todd Dusenbery, and Susan Perez.

In Atlanta, Democracy Program Director Charles Costello was responsible for directing The Carter Center's Nigeria program. Conflict Resolution Director Harry Barnes and Director of Peace Programs Gordon Streeb directed the project before January. Democracy Program Associate Director David Carroll and Conflict Resolution Program Coordinator Kirk Wolcott led daily operations, including hiring and managing staff, and selecting and briefing delegates. Assisting them were Democracy Program Administrative Assistant Tynasha Green and Logistics Coordinator Janet Owens. During the elections, several other Center staff played vital roles in Atlanta and Nigeria, including Nancy Konigsmark who oversaw arrangements for President Carter's January visit, Jason Calder, Catherine Clarke, Matt Cirillo, Curtis Kohlhaas, Mike Meenan, Karine Pouchain, Laine Price, and Karin Ryan.

A large part of the credit for our work must go to our Nigerian staffs, led by Logistics Coordinator Tunde Durosinmi-Etti, who provided technical and managerial assistance throughout this initiative. The local team in Lagos included Office Manager Raphael Odunlami, Program Assistants Joseph Adebo and Joseph Olaore, Logistics Officers Jabril Iyamah and Segun Adeuja, and driver Hakim Yetti. In Abuja, the team included Office Manager Sandra Omali, Program Assistants Julie Nembis and Debo Olorunmola, and driver Samuel. These individuals brought inspiring enthusiasm, dedication, and insight

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

to their work.

Throughout the transition, NDI and The Carter Center received important assistance from the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in accrediting and obtaining visas for our international observers. Special thanks also go to Nigerian Ambassador to the United Nations Professor I.A. Gambari and his staff in New York, who assisted immeasurably by providing visas expeditiously.

Sincere thanks also go to the NDI/Carter Center delegates who volunteered their time and expertise and brought unique contributions to the success of this endeavor. The delegates accepted grave responsibilities under frequently harsh conditions without complaint, demonstrating great commitment to the cause of advancing democracy throughout the mission.

Finally, we again acknowledge Kirk Wolcott, who drafted sections of this report and managed final editing and revisions. Other sections were drafted by Gillian Flies, Robert LaGamma, Peter Lewis, and Brent Preston. David Carroll, Shari Bryan, Chris Fomunyoh, Todd Dusenbery, and Carter Center Publications Manager Pam Smith assisted in editing the report, along with Carter Center interns Catherine Clarke, Karin Pouchain, Laine Price, and Caroline Wild. ■

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- A. Nigerian Heads of State, 1960–Present
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- E. State and Gubernatorial Elections Statement
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APPENDIX A

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## APPENDIX B

## TRANSITION TIMELINE

1998	Oct.	5	Voter registration begins	
		19	Voter registration ends INEC announces registered parties	
	Dec.	5	Elections: Local government Councilors and Chairmen	
1999	Jan.	7	Elections: House of Assembly and Gubernatorial	
		Feb.	15	Election campaign begins
		20	Elections: Senate and House of Representatives	
		26	Election campaign ends	
		27	Elections: Presidential	
	March	6	Run-off, if any, for National Assembly and presidential elections	
	May	29	Swearing in of the President	

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## APPENDIX C

## ELECTION OVERVIEW

Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced Oct. 19 that it had registered nine political parties to contest the first round of elections:

**Local Elections**

Alliance for Democracy (AD)	The United Democratic Movement
The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)	The United Peoples' Party
Peoples' Redemption Party	Movement for Democracy and Justice
Democratic Advancement Movement	National Solidarity Movement
All Peoples' Party (APP)	

INEC stipulated that to contest the next three rounds of elections, parties must win at least 5 percent of the vote in 24 of Nigeria's 36 states. The following three parties advanced:

**State and National Elections**

APP  
AD\*  
PDP

\* The PDP and APP secured the required votes in the minimum number of states. AD won 5 percent in only 12 states, but INEC registered the party, stipulating that at least three parties would contest the remaining elections.

**Alliance**

To defeat the PDP, which won more than half the votes in the first two elections, the APP and AD sought to present a joint candidate for the Feb. 27 presidential election. INEC Chairman Justice Ephraim Akpata ruled that the proposed alliance was unacceptable, but he did allow the parties to put forward a single candidate for the presidential election if the candidate ran for one party only.

**Presidential Elections**

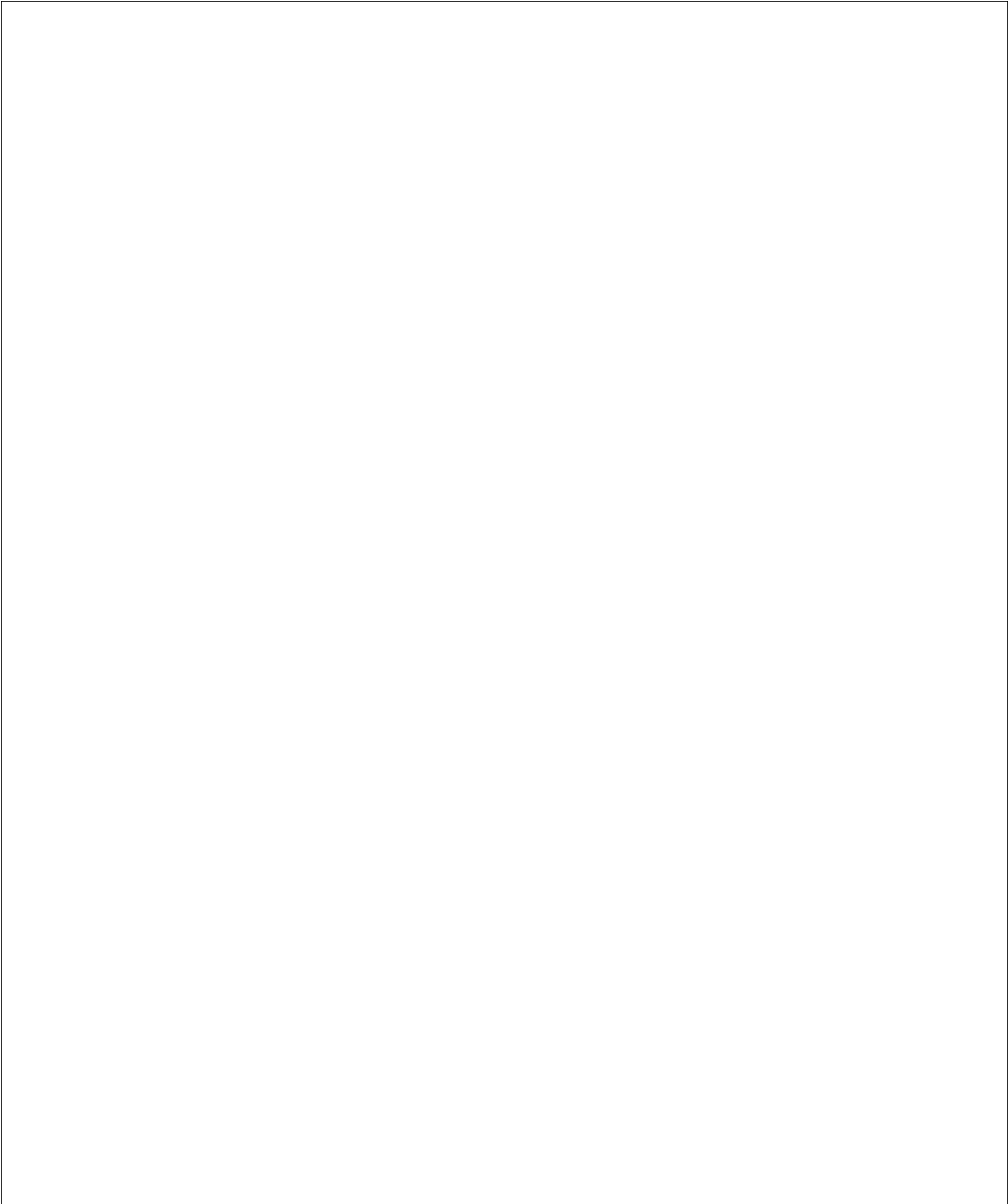
After the parties held their conventions, the AD decided to run its candidate on the APP ticket. The APP-AD alliance and the PDP named their presidential and vice presidential candidates as follows:

	<u>AD/APP</u>	<u>PDP</u>
President:	Chief Olu Falae (AD)	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo
Vice President:	Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi (APP)	Alhaji Abubakar Atiku

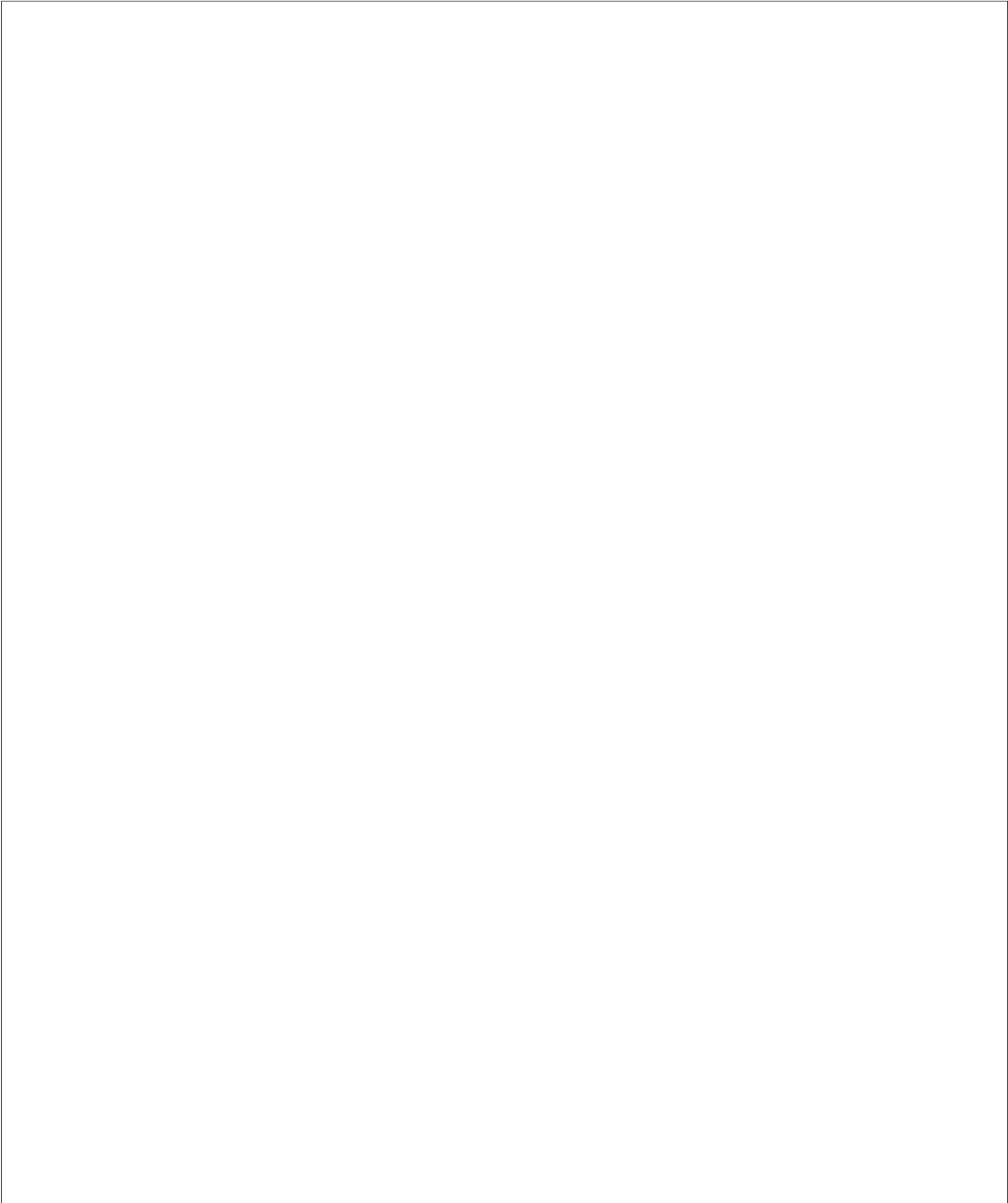
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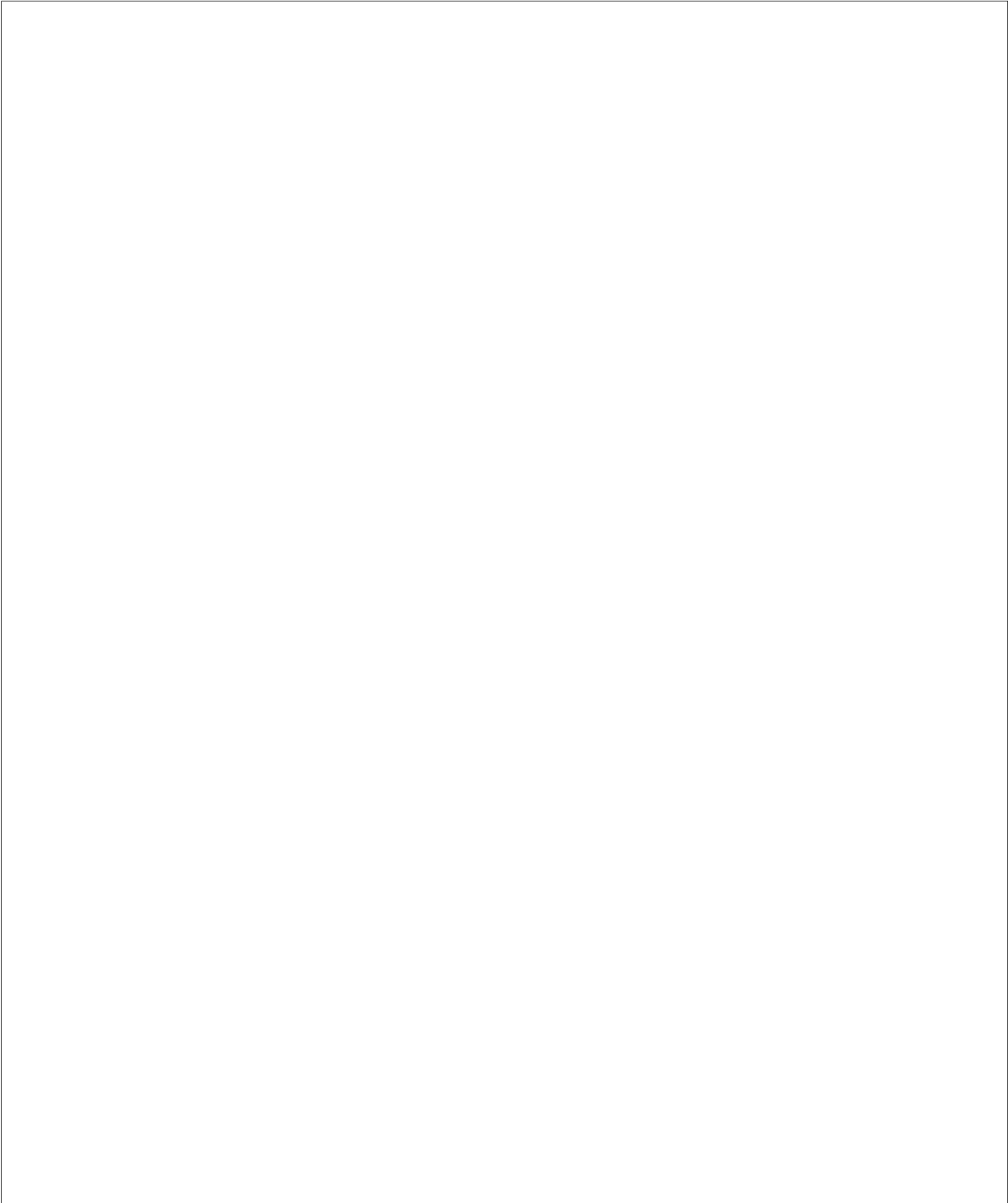
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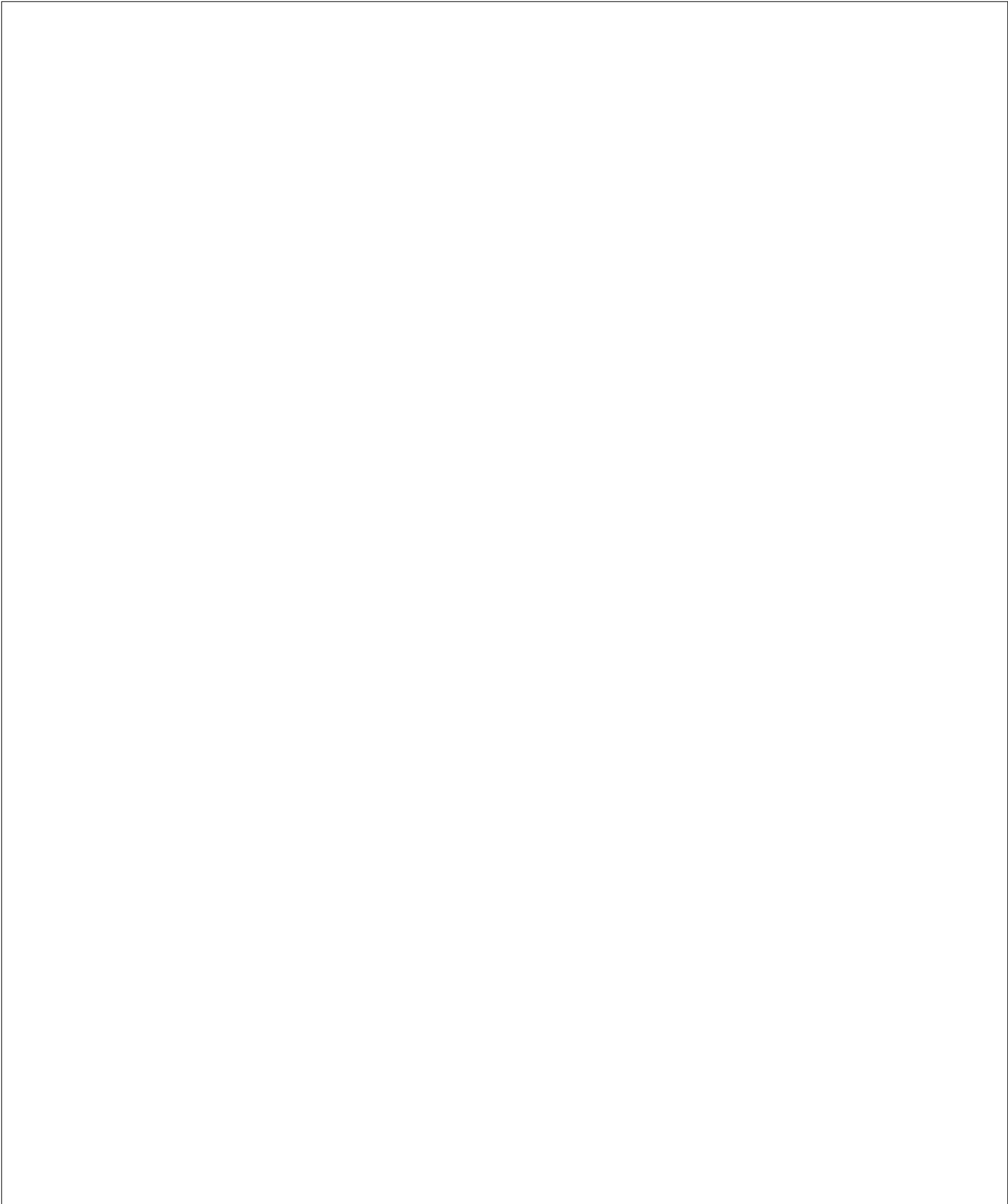
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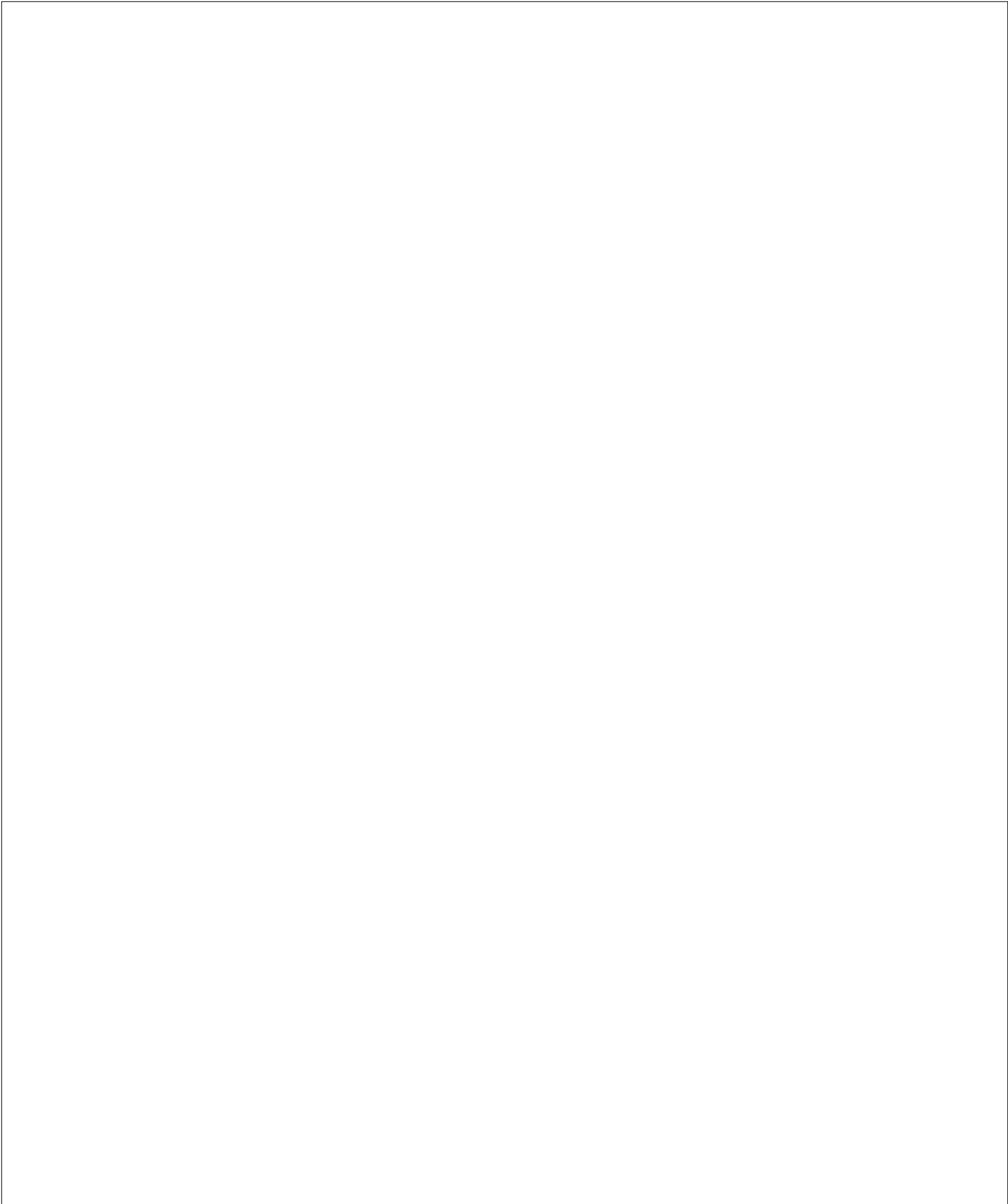
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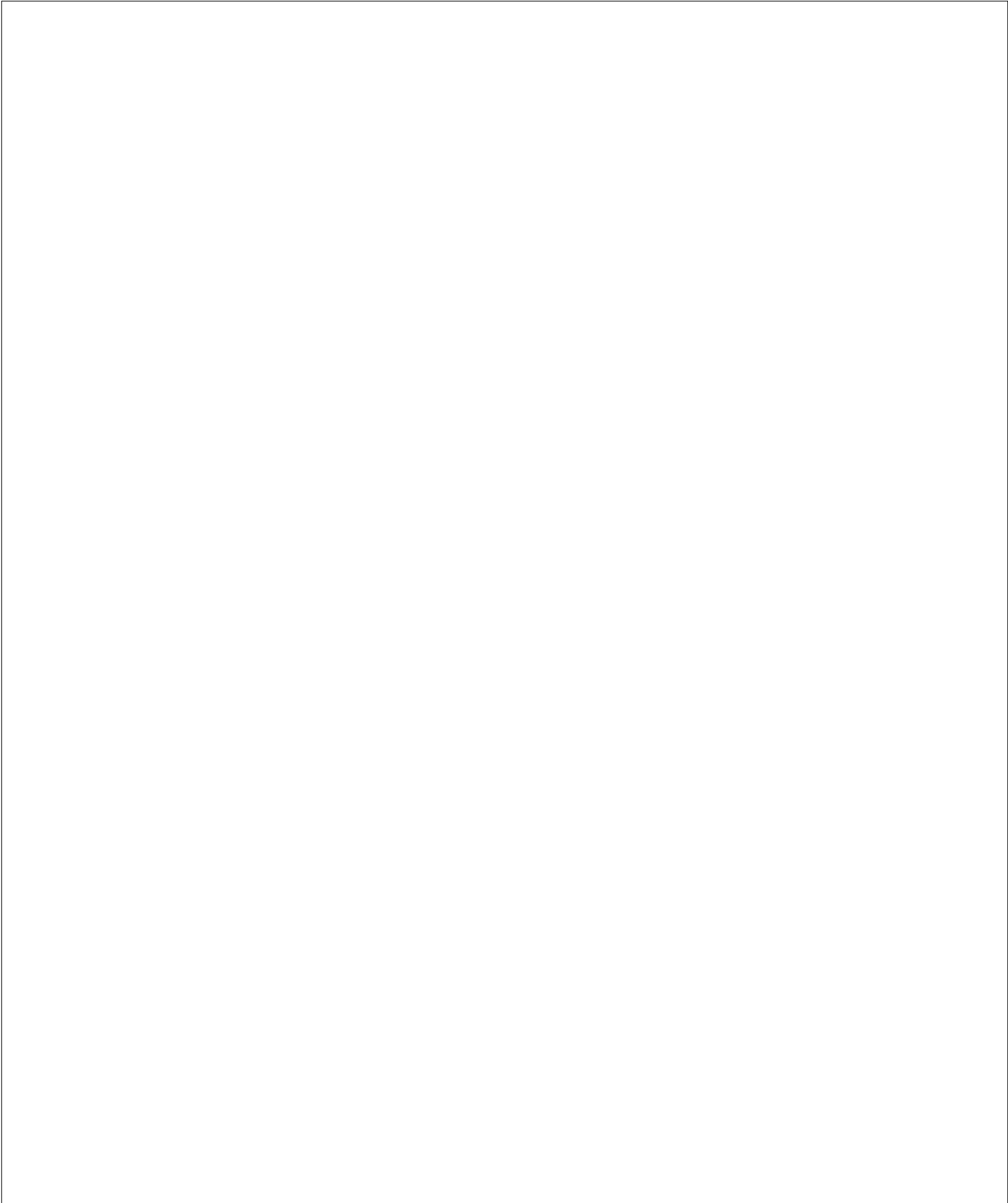
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APPENDIX I

**Map of Nigeria's 36 States and  
Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja**



OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

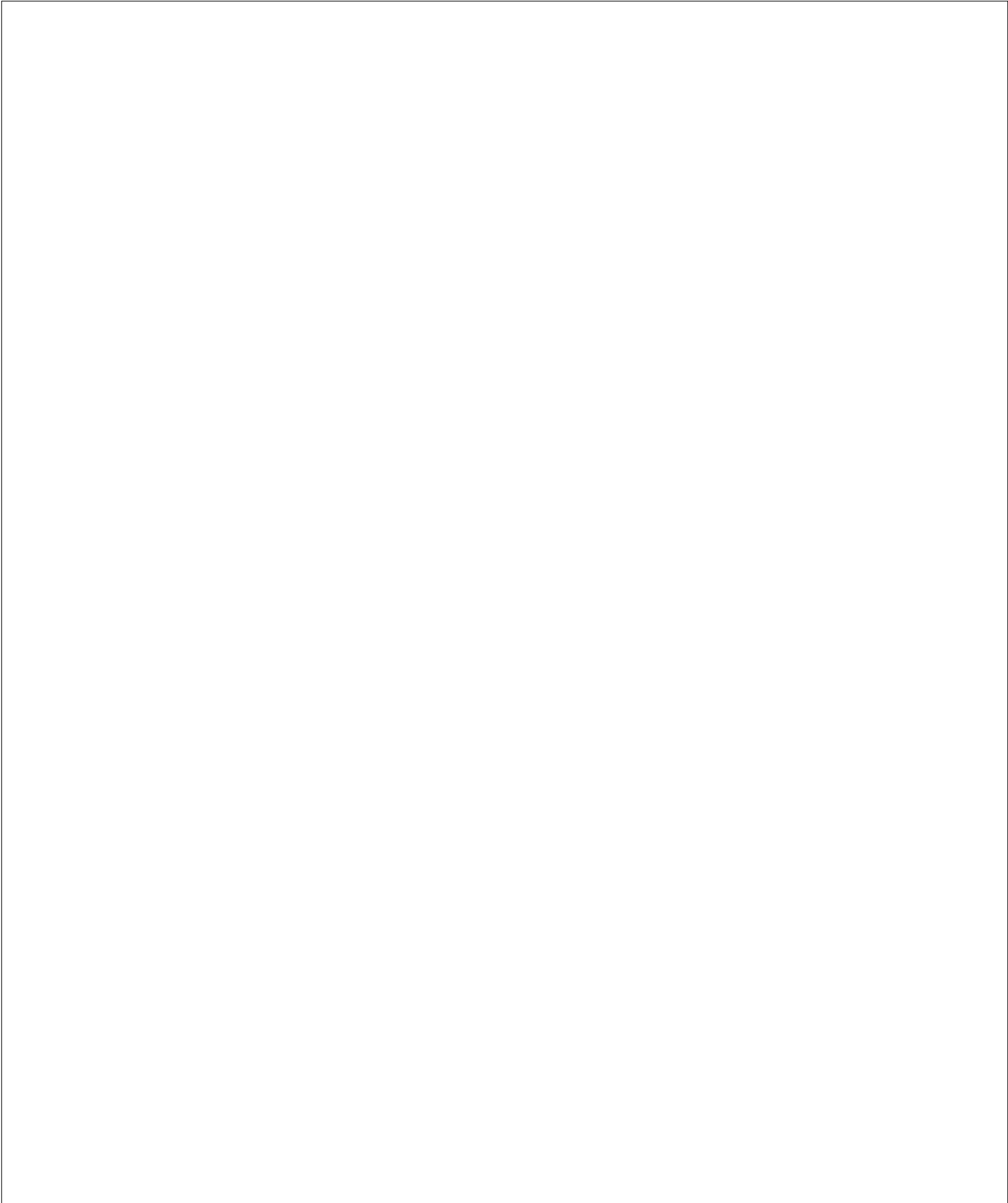
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APPENDIX K

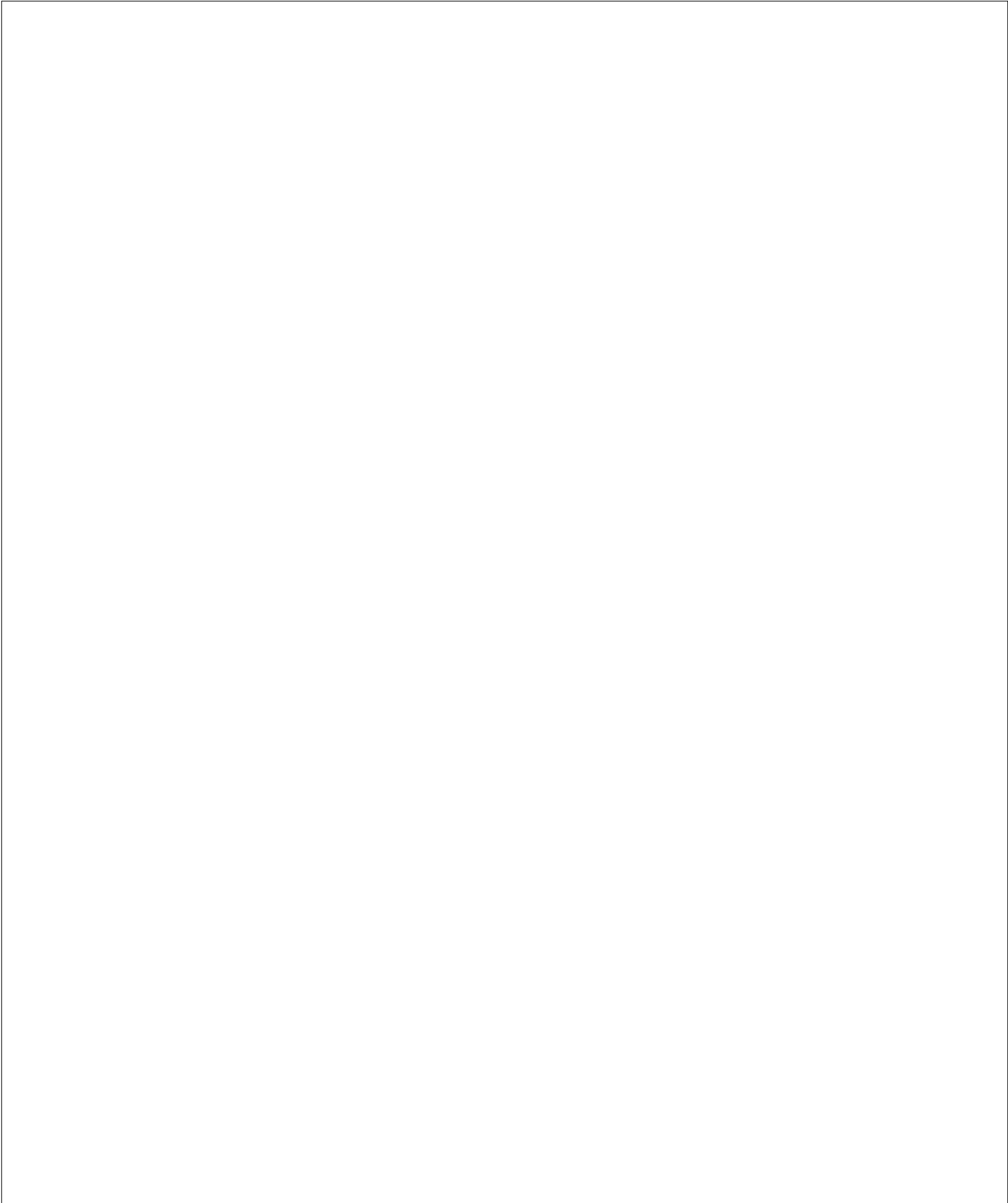
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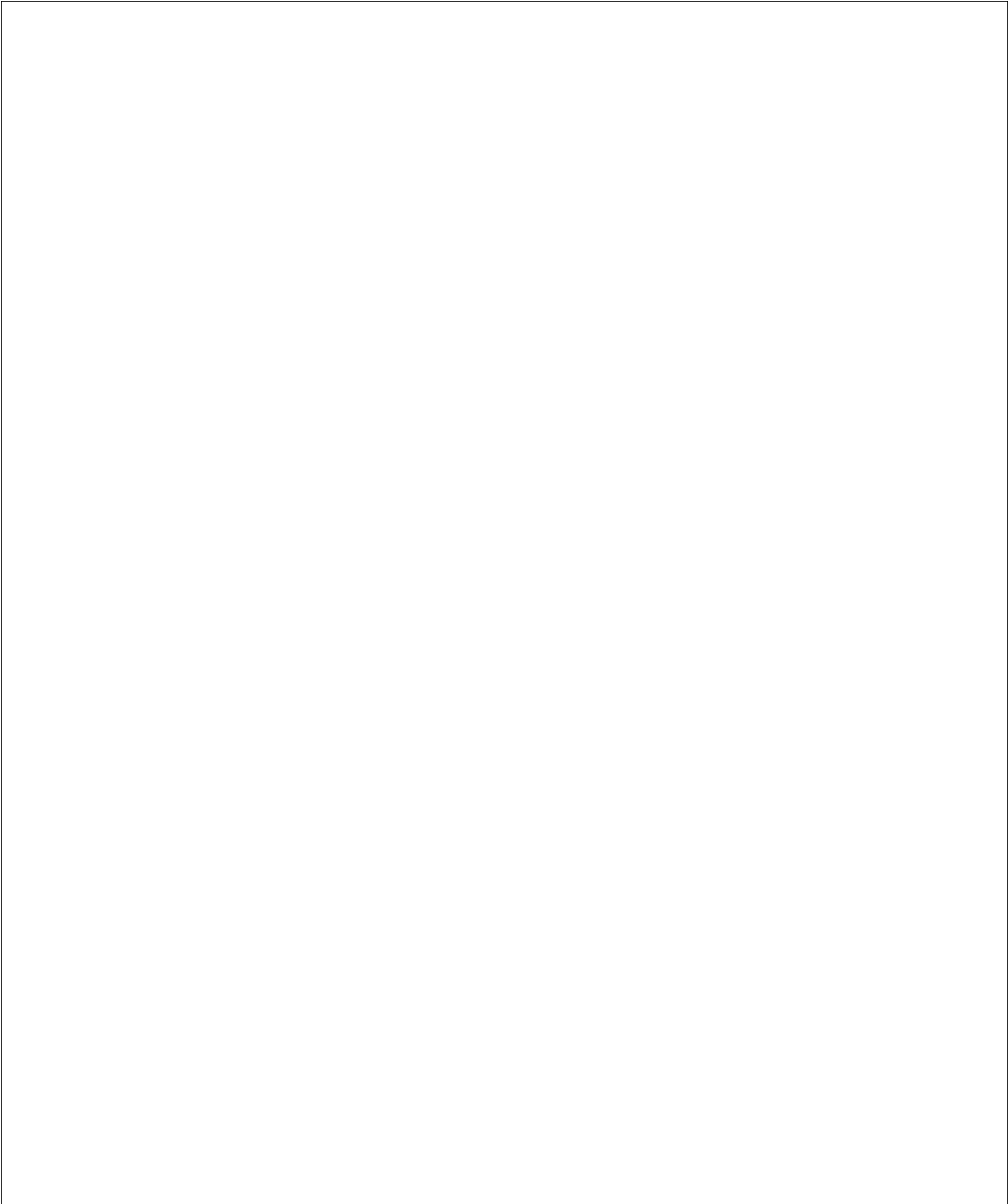
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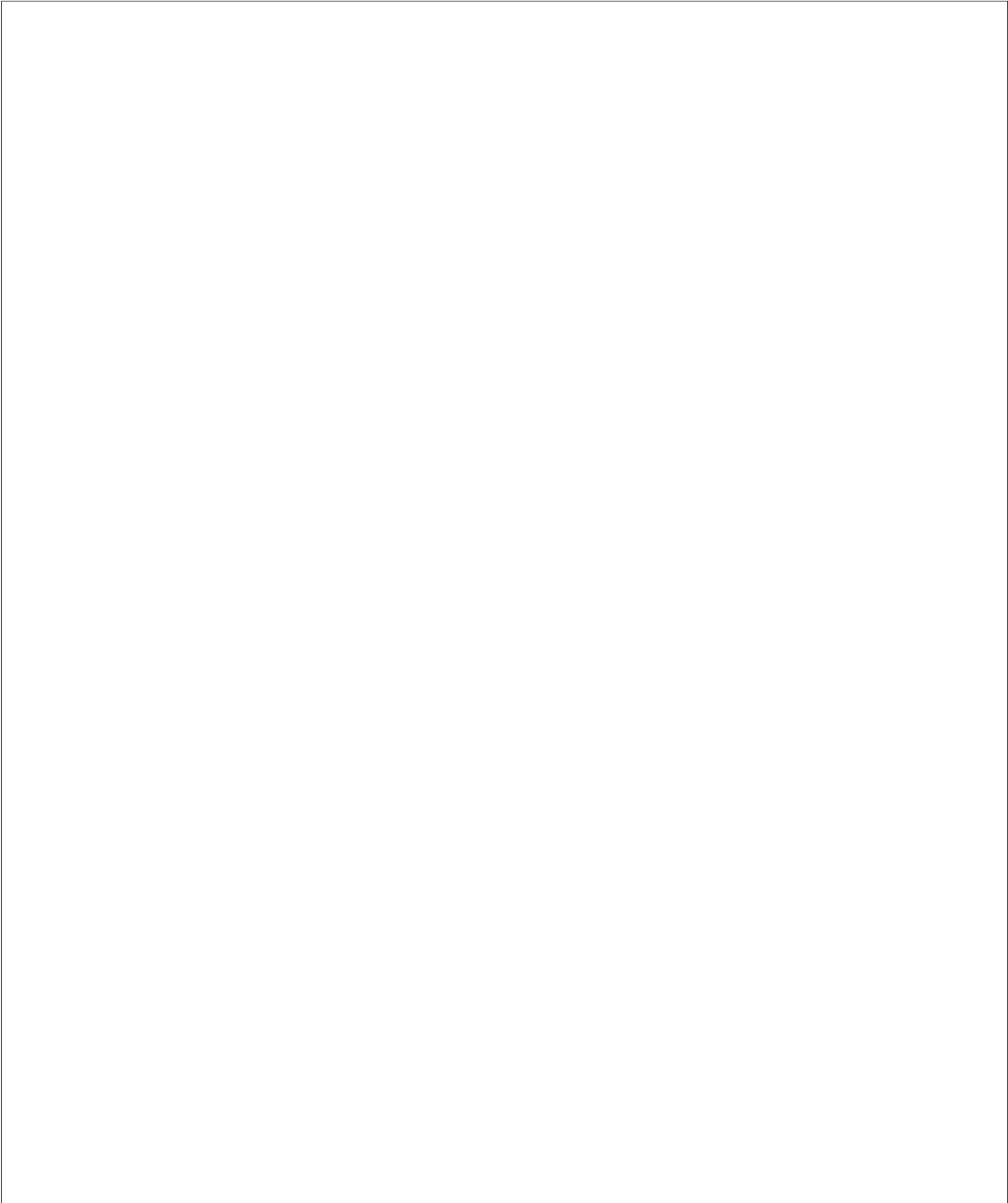
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## APPENDIX N



JIMMY CARTER

1 March 1999

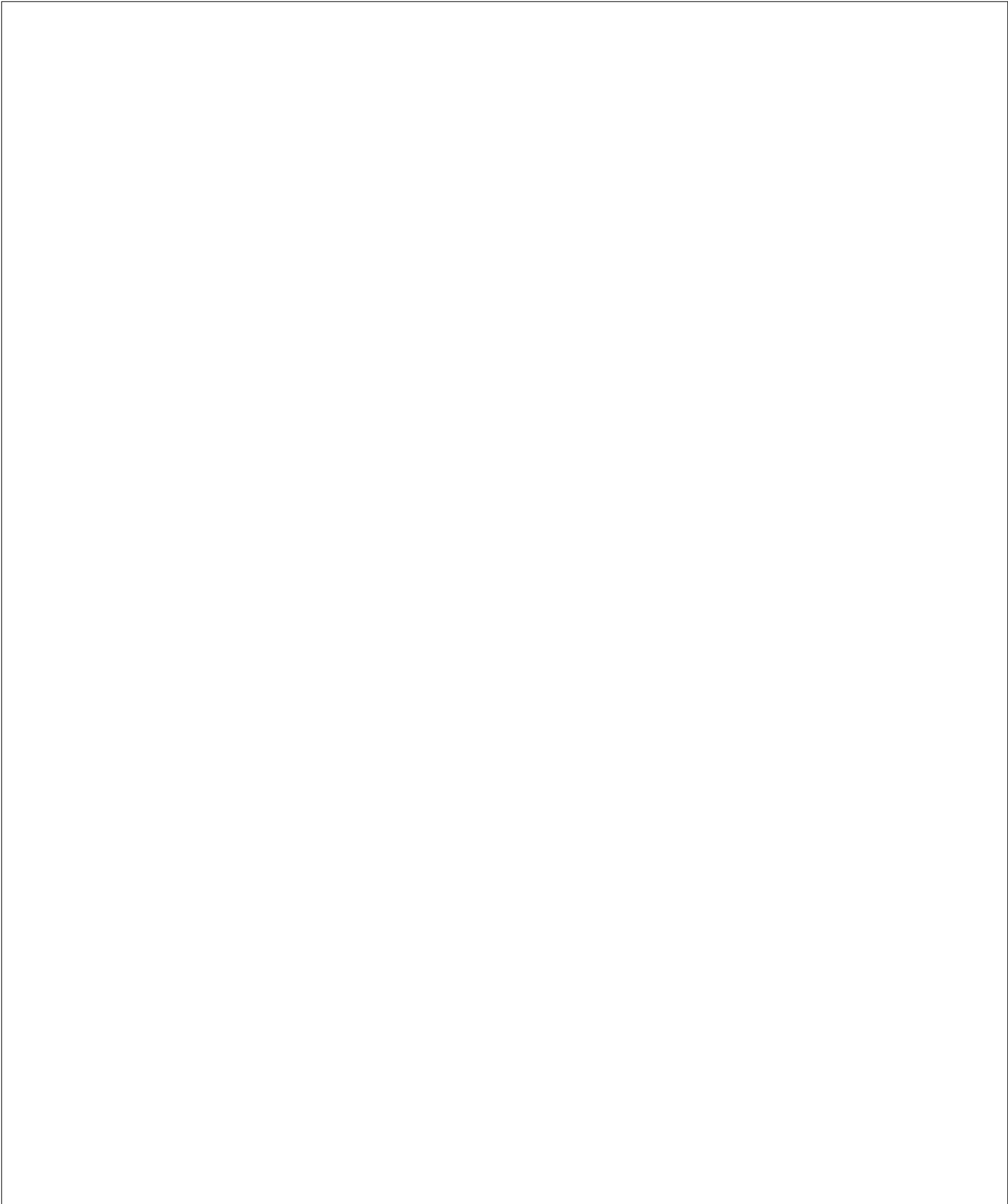
To Chairman Akpata, Independent National Elections Commission

There was a wide disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling stations and the final results that have been reported from several states. Regrettably, therefore, it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election.

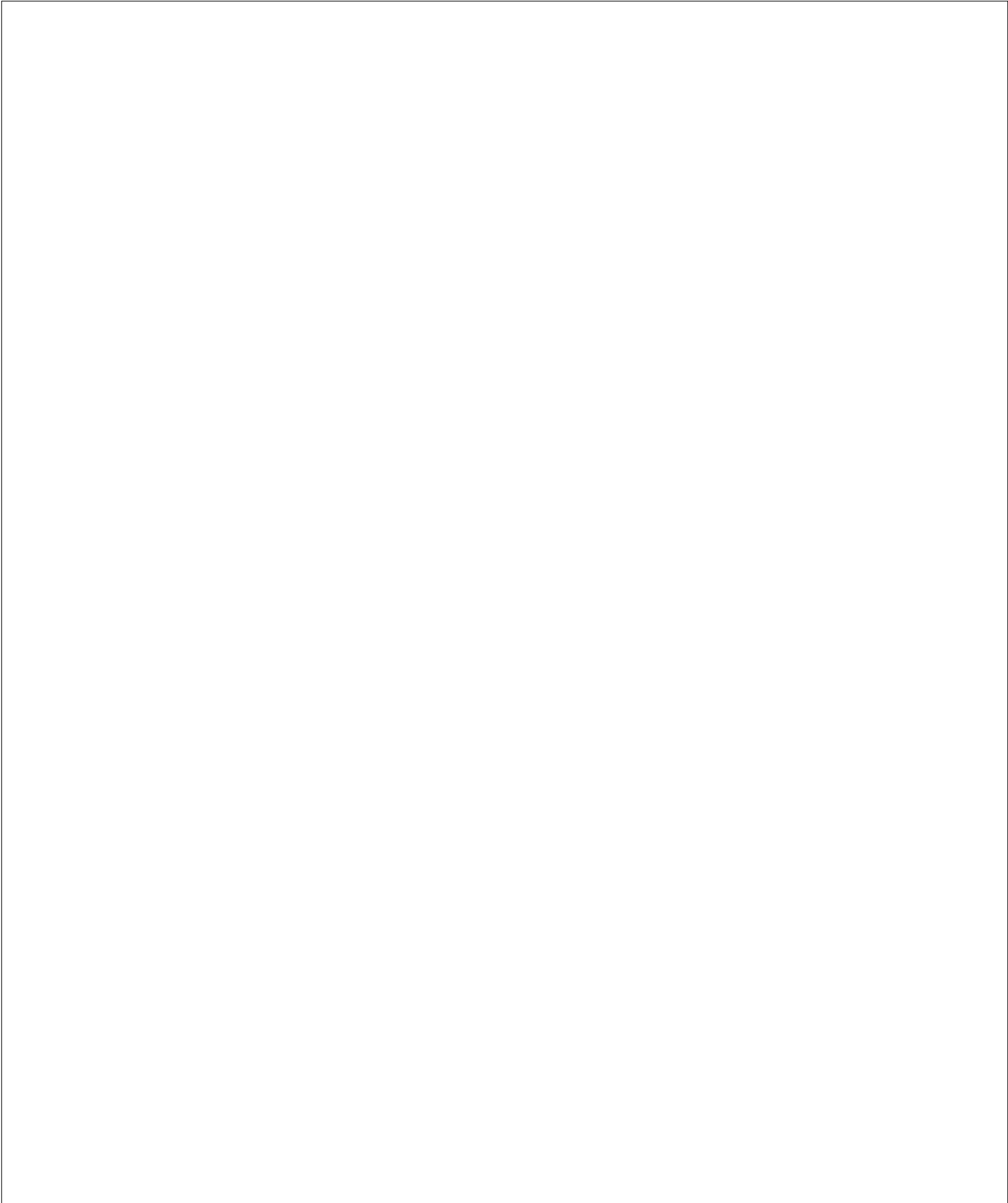
*Jimmy Carter  
for The Carter Center*



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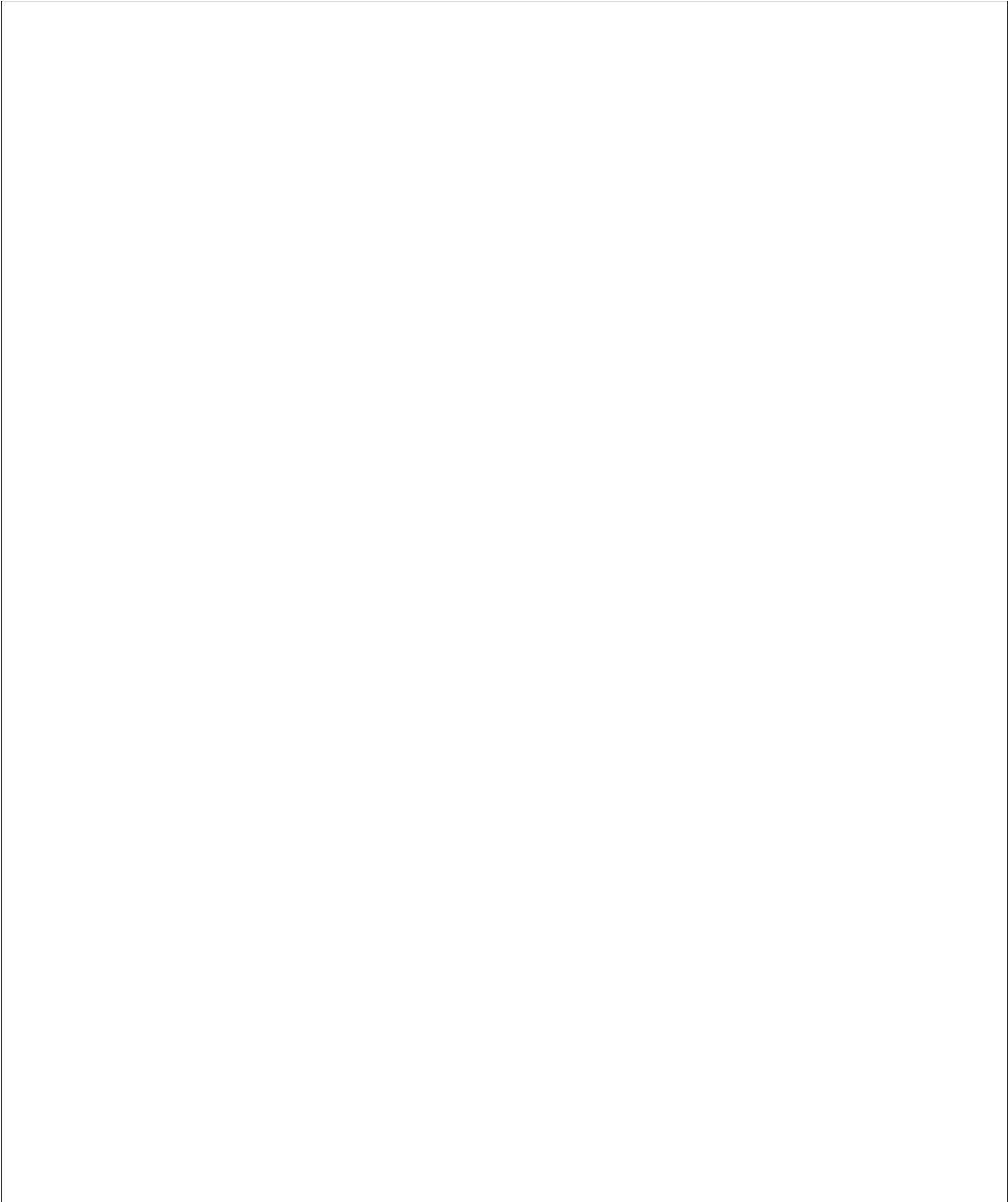
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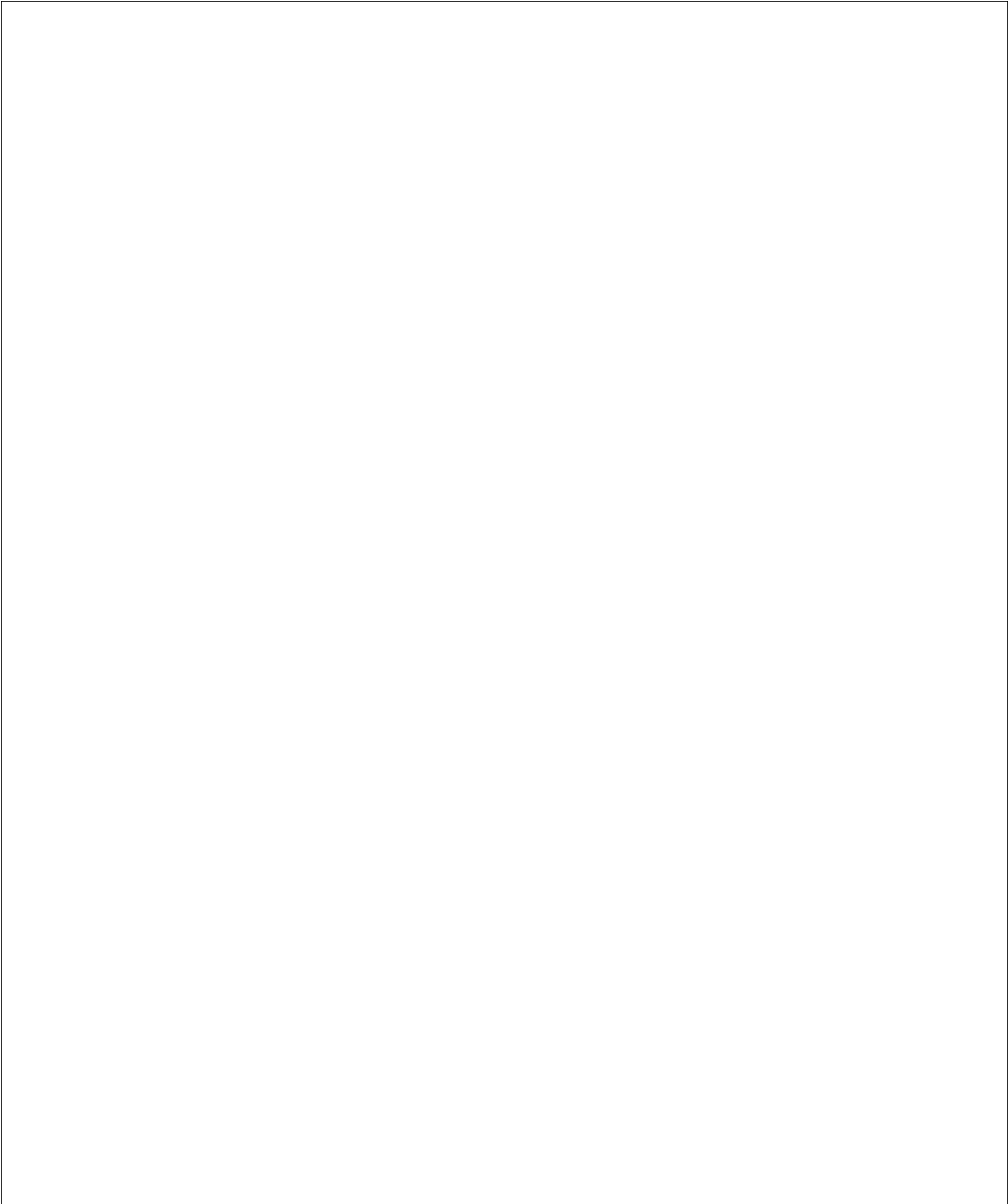
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## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## APPENDIX P

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**Tuesday, March 2**

# Nigeria Confirms Vote Result

## *Loser Cites Fraud, Calls for Protests*

By JAMES RUPERT  
*Washington Post Foreign Service*

BY CORINNE OLFKA—REUTERS

**Obasanjo reads Falae's statement  
refusing to accept election results.**

LAGOS, Nigeria, March 1—Nigeria's election commission declared today that former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo won Saturday's presidential election, but Obasanjo's opponent called for protests against what he said was a fraudulent result.

In Abuja, the capital, Nigeria's election commission chairman, retired Supreme Court judge Ephraim Akpata, declared Obasanjo elected with nearly 19 million votes, or 63 percent of all ballots cast. His opponent, Olu Falae, received 11 million votes, or 37 percent. Under rules laid down by Nigeria's military government, Obasanjo will be sworn in on May 29 as the first civilian president in more than 15 years.

Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, who is in Nigeria as part of an observer delegation from the Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, said irregularities had clouded the outcome of the voting, and Falae's supporters seized on the statement as evidence for their case.

Falae, a former finance minister, asked his voters "to show their dissatisfaction by protesting" with "political action, yes, protest, yes, but not violence." Vote fraud was "so monumental as to make nonsense of the entire process," he told the Associated Press.

Obasanjo, who led a military government for four years before handing power to civilians in 1979, said voting irregularities had been committed by "ignorant" people. But he called on his opponents to accept the result and "join hands with all of us, because at this point in time that is what we need."

In a letter to the election commission, Carter noted that, in some states, many more votes were recorded than there were voters observed at the polls. "Regrettably, therefore, it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election," he said.

The election's credibility carries high political stakes. After military rule that has left Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with more than 100 million people, in a shambles, an election perceived as fair would ease the return to civilian rule. That, say democracy advocates, would be the single greatest advance for democracy on this continent since the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994.

With only 13 weeks before the military is due to hand power to the winner of Saturday's vote, "God knows, no one wants to see this fail," a foreign diplomat said.

Blatant fraud was evident Saturday, as journalists, diplomats and election monitors reported that local officials stuffed ballot boxes on behalf of one candidate or the other. While no monitoring organization echoed Falae's contention that Obasanjo's victory was clearly fraudulent, they differed on its certainty.

The European Union's observer mission expressed "serious concern" over the fraud but said, "We judge that the result of the election ... reflects the wishes of the Nigerian people." The Transition Monitoring Group, a coalition of Nigerian pro-democracy organizations that fielded 10,000 election observers, said fraud had been committed by both sides and "it is difficult to say the extent to which the efforts of [the] two parties canceled each other."

The Clinton administration withheld judgment on the credibility of Obasanjo's victory. In Washington, National Security Council spokesman David Leavy said "any allegations of vote irregularities should be looked into by the appropriate authorities." He underscored the importance of Nigeria's shift to civilian rule, saying that "a Nigeria that is democratic and protects human and civilian rights can be an anchor for the new Africa."

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

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## NIGERIA'S FUTURE



## Can Obasanjo save Nigeria?

ABUJA

**The task facing Nigeria's new president is immense. Is he up to it?**

AS HE surveys the state of his country in the aftermath of his election victory on February 27th, President-elect Olusegun Obasanjo might be forgiven for thinking that what Nigeria needs is a sharp kick from a military boot. Yet, once a general himself, Mr Obasanjo of all people knows how years of military rule have corrupted and weakened his country. Can this crusty old warrior, who last ran the country—in uniform—in 1979, now drag Nigeria back from the brink of chaos?

For an ex-general, his political credentials are good. As military ruler in 1979, he nobly handed over to an elected civilian government. That government borrowed, stole and squandered until it was overthrown by the soldiers again four years later. Then the army, once seen as the only institution capable of running the country, turned instead to looting, and destroyed it. Nigeria's descent into chaos accelerated.

In the 20 years since Mr Obasanjo last held the reins of power, this vast, shambolic but energetic country of more than 100m people has seen its income per person slide from \$788 to \$679. Nigeria's currency, the naira, has gone from nearly \$2 then to little more than one cent now. Today's Nigeria has no constitution. Its economy, already plundered by high-level theft and corrup-

tion, will be further damaged by the continuing slide in the price of oil, the commodity that provides 98.9% of export earnings. More and more Nigerians now live in poverty, angry and demoralised. Can one man, however well-intentioned, make a difference?

Mr Obasanjo will be given no period of political grace, either before he takes office on May 29th or after. His defeated rival for the presidency, Olu Falae, a former finance minister, has already challenged the election result, claiming that voting was rigged and ballot boxes were stuffed. International monitors agree up to a point, but say that any rigging was done by the political parties, not by the government, and that anyway it was not on a big enough scale to affect the result.

With 7m more votes than Mr Falae, Mr Obasanjo has a comfortable-sounding margin. Yet he may still lack the clout to govern effectively in such a divided country. He won a clear majority in most central and northern states, yet did quite poorly in four south-western states (see map on next page). Both he and Mr Falae are Yorubas from the south-west, but Mr Obasanjo is distrusted there as a man co-opted by the north. In Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital and the engine-room of what is left of

the non-oil economy, he won only 12%.

Perhaps the new president's greatest asset is that he comes to office after General Sani Abacha, the worst ruler Nigeria has ever had. Under pressure from international donors, Abacha had been planning a return to civilian rule, but his plan entailed all five officially sanctioned political parties proclaiming him their candidate for president. That prospect proved too much even for Nigeria's pliable political elite. It drove 18 northern leaders and another 16 from the south—known as the Group of 34—to join forces with a handful of democracy campaigners and oppose publicly the general's plan to "succeed himself". Last June, as they braced themselves for the general's wrath, Abacha died (whether from natural or unnatural causes is still not certain). Luckily for Nigeria, his relaxed and affable interim successor, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, did a prompt about-turn, released some political prisoners, and set in train the process that led to this week's flawed but free election.

Luckily for Mr Obasanjo, General Abubakar had already begun to restore relations with Nigeria's western donors and to persuade them to lift sanctions imposed in 1995, after the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a prominent minority activist. Negotiations began with the IMF and the general abolished the dual exchange rate that had allowed Abacha's cronies to buy cheap dollars. Until May 29th, when Mr Obasanjo takes over, the country will be run by a Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) of senior military officers.

Mr Obasanjo could use this time, first, to build a national coalition government, second, to work on his promised blueprint for Nigeria. Top of his agenda should be three issues: corruption, weaning the economy off its dependency on oil, and finding a more democratic federal system that spreads power and money more evenly through the country.

**For the chop**

Hardest of all, perhaps, will be to eradicate Nigeria's culture of theft. Take just one example. Nigeria is the world's eighth-largest oil producer, pumping about 2m barrels a day, yet for the past five years it has had a fuel shortage. The country's three refineries should provide Nigerians with oil, yet there is almost none. Queues of vehicles wait days at garages for a few litres. Why? Because Abacha found fuel import licences an effective source of patronage for his cronies, so he made sure that the refineries were not maintained and therefore that Ni-

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

geria had to import fuel. Much of it was then sold on the black market at twice the official price.

The fate of Mobutu's Zaire, where the state had withered away completely and the only system was corruption, now hangs over Nigeria. Some public servants still try to stay honest, but most, from bureaucrats to policemen and nurses, will not lift a finger without a bribe. Ordinary Nigerians are only mimicking their political masters. Corruption spreads from the top down. The Nigerian state does not command loyalty or service. It is regarded as a vast pie to be eaten—or "chopped" as Nigerians say—at every opportunity, especially by those who run it. Pat Utomi, director of the Lagos Business School, says: "Nigeria is the most privatised state in the world, only those who now own it did not pay for it."

Nigeria's public and private institutions—including foreign companies—are being eaten away by corruption. Roads, hospitals and schools disintegrate as funds for maintenance are pocketed. Daily power cuts in the cities force factories to close. Drug smuggling, money laundering and all sorts of frauds have made Nigeria synonymous with international crime. American drug officials speak almost in awe of the inventiveness and audacity of Nigerian crime syndicates.

The injection of petrodollars has meant that Nigeria's governments, particularly its military governments, have not been accountable to the people. They have relied on foreign oil companies and the army, rather than votes or taxes, to keep them in power. Local leaders, emirs, kings or chiefs could always be bought. It is a system most Nigerians seem to accept with a shrug.

If Mr Obasanjo wants to change this, he will also have to start at the top. But that means taking on some of the ex-military men who bankrolled his campaign. Here he could join forces with General Abubakar. Early on in his interim administration, the outgoing general trumpeted the discovery of \$800m, stolen by Abacha. The Abacha family finances were to be investigated. But then silence. Diplomats say that the stolen money has been distributed to members of the PRC, as their final pay-off before leaving office.

Chances are, the first demands on Mr Obasanjo will come from campaign backers, who will now want to recoup their outlay through government contracts and concessions. Some of Nigeria's richest men,

many of them former generals, hope that because they backed their former comrade-in arms, they will now be spared any probe into their fortunes. But Mr Obasanjo has promised an investigation into corruption. That would help win over some of his opponents in the south-west. Forcing a few prominent generals to turn out their pockets would make him the most popular man in Nigeria. Lebanon, Britain and Switzerland, where much of the stolen money lies, have indicated they would be willing to freeze bank accounts of those accused. The money recovered could be spent on the roads, hospitals and schools it was meant for. It would be a start, at least.

The economy, meanwhile, is in a critical state. Oil, or rather the misuse of oil money, has been the downfall of Nigeria.



After the price leapt in the 1970s, Nigerians abandoned almost all other economic activity in the mad scramble for a sop of oil wealth. The professional middle classes devoted themselves to getting government contracts and licences to import goods, while the oil-driven, high-valued naira destroyed Nigeria's traditional agricultural exports of cocoa, cotton and groundnuts. Millions of small farmers were quickly impoverished.

#### Running on empty

Now the state's coffers are empty, just when some extra spending might give the new government a breathing-space and a chance to appease angry losers. The arithmetic is horribly simple. The economy is expected to shrink by more than 1% this year. If the oil price drops to \$11 a barrel, Nigeria will receive only \$7.3 billion from its oil exports this year. In 1997, oil revenue was

## NIGERIA'S FUTURE

\$15.2 billion. After debt repayments and investment in oil, there will be little left for the government to pay its army of public servants, let alone the country's twitchy soldiers. Forget about new roads or school books or medicine. The budget gap will widen if the oil price falls further. And with billions in unserviced debts, Nigeria cannot borrow more to fill the hole.

In January General Abubakar reached a tentative agreement with the IMF. Its staff will monitor basic economic policy until June, when they will negotiate an economic reform programme for Nigeria. Once the IMF is satisfied that Nigeria is on track, the country will be able to renegotiate its debt (the amount is disputed: \$28 billion, says the Fund, \$31 billion, says the World Bank, \$26 billion, says Nigeria). In the meantime the Bank, which has had minimal contact with Nigeria since 1993, is trying to arrange a meeting of western donor countries to provide support for the new government in its first difficult year. The meeting, however, will not take place until next month at the earliest.

In the short term, the new government will probably be blamed for doing little or nothing to make life easier for the people. Yet, if it can survive this recession, Nigeria may find some harsh benefit in a lower oil price. Its future political and economic stability depends in large part on ending the dependency culture oil has created. The government needs to learn to collect taxes, for proper social spending, and Nigerians need to find more productive livelihoods. Like many a bust economy, Nigeria has talent, energy and creativity in abundance. Mr Utomi estimates that unrecorded economic activity, from metal bashing to bun selling in the streets, already produces double the output of the more formal non-oil part of the economy. The difficulty is to harness such entrepreneurship to make things Nigeria can export, alongside its oil.

Following the example of others with empty coffers, Nigeria has already begun to prepare its decrepit national power supply and telecoms for privatisation. Any benefit, however, will be long in coming. A more dramatic sell-off would be the oil industry. Were the government to sell its majority share, it would be relieved of the yearly burden of "cash calls", the millions of dollars needed for its share in continuing exploration costs.

But selling at this time would bring in less than the government might wish. And



## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## NIGERIA'S FUTURE

privatisation is still politically unpopular in Nigeria. Some see it as selling off the family silver. Others fear that all the most valuable companies will be bought up for a song by the corrupt generals who milked and ruined them in the first place. To the outside world, however, such sales, managed tolerably decently, would at least be a sign that Nigeria now understood its salvation no longer lies with oil and the political corruption the business has spawned.

**Split and fractured**

Oil, however, has not only cursed Nigeria's economy. By making people believe they should be rich, it has also blighted politics, especially among those who live over it. The people of the Niger Delta have watched billions of dollars flow out from their soil as they have grown poorer. Now they are angry. The delta is home to some 8m people, split into thousands of small communities divided by language and ethnicity. The government's policy in the past, followed to some extent by the oil companies, was to play one group off against another. That has merely exacerbated rivalries: small wars have broken out in some areas.

Young militants have started to attack oil installations, kidnap oil workers and damage pipelines to demand compensation for oil spills. Some radical groups campaigning against the oil companies are demanding "control of resources and self-determination". This sounds like a call to break away from Nigeria, but the radicals say they will settle for direct negotiations with the oil companies for a slice of their income. Last year such agitation managed to halve Nigeria's on-shore production for several months.

The oil companies are chary of anything that suggests the oil belongs to anyone except the Nigerian government. However, Royal Dutch/Shell, the main onshore

operator and chief victim of the disruption, is trying to head off local anger by spending some \$40m on "community relations" this year, spread across the 1,500 communities in Shell's operational area. This sum does not include the millions more spent on compensation and ransom. Yet the rivalry between and within local groups is now so bad that Shell's well-intentioned efforts, building roads and schools, may only exacerbate jealousies and rivalries between villages, rather than pacify the delta region. For now, the fighting is done with old guns, bows and arrows. But these conflicts could yet turn the area into another Sierra Leone or Liberia.

Only Nigeria's government can stop this. General Abubakar, having withdrawn some soldiers from the region, has been trying to keep the temperature down by talking. Mr Obasanjo's new government, when it takes office, may be forced to look again not only at the land law, which designates all minerals as government property, but also the amount of revenue given back to the oil regions from central funds. The figure was once 15%, but has fallen to 3% under successive military governments. Almost none anyway reaches the ordinary people of the delta, who have become some of the poorest in Africa.

The delta crisis is also forcing a rethink of Nigeria's federal structure. Under military rule, the number of states was increased from 19 to 36, so that senior officers could be given jobs as governors and the opportunity to "chop". Real power however remained firmly at the centre. A consensus is now emerging, at least in the south, that Nigeria should be allowed to develop as six regions; north-east, north-west, middle belt, south-west, south-east and the delta, called south-south. Mr Obasanjo could transfer funds and power to these regions and allow the present states to be-

come provinces within them, with local government functions.

Will the new president be allowed to go beyond thinking about it? Election fraud and a loser crying foul are classic excuses in Nigeria for military intervention. This time, however, the soldiers are unlikely to try to step in immediately. They know that Abacha—and their own greedy behaviour—have made them too unpopular. Meanwhile, senior officers still provide the governors of the states and the bosses of the country's big companies—positions that have made them extremely rich. With luck, that means that most senior officers will be content to retire from their posts in government after May 29th.

**Rank insiders?**

The bigger danger will come from the second rank: colonels and brigadiers who have patiently lived on measly army pay, waiting for their turn at the trough. Many of them were promoted for loyalty to Abacha, rather than skill. They will feel slighted if Mr Obasanjo now passes them over to appoint his own men to top army posts. Another threat could come from junior officers, inspired by idealism rather than money, who want to purge the country of corruption by a violent revolutionary coup.

There have been coup attempts along these lines in Nigeria before, but none has succeeded because of the sheer size of the army and because its senior officers are too numerous and powerful. These days, however, a large part of Nigeria's 80,000-strong army is serving in the West African peace-keeping force in Sierra Leone—and suffering hundreds of casualties. This makes junior officers, who have borne the brunt of the fighting in a small country they care little about, even more dissatisfied. There have been reports of desertions and of troops refusing to be sent to Sierra Leone. Mr Obasanjo has said he will review the commitment to Sierra Leone. A strong internationalist, he is unlikely to pull the troops out willingly, but pressure from within the army may force his hand. Then how would the army spend its days?

In an attempt to head off any brewing discontent, Mr Obasanjo needs to work closely over the next few months and beyond with General Abubakar, making sure that he does not alienate the army completely, even as he seeks to restructure it and implement economic reforms to rescue the country from the army's own past excesses. He also needs a vision for Nigeria and a plan to bring it about. He revealed little of either during the election campaign. As for those army officers who stand to lose some of the perks they have grown rich on, many are confident that the civilians will mess things up again—and, sooner or later, they will be back in charge.



Awaiting a new burst of energy

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices, and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

Democracy depends on legislatures that represent citizens and oversee the executive, independent judiciaries that safeguard the rule of law, political parties that are open and accountable, and elections in which voters freely choose their representatives in government. Acting as a catalyst for democratic development, NDI bolsters the institutions and processes that allow democracy to flourish.

**Build Political and Civic Organizations:** NDI helps build the stable, broad-based, and well-organized institutions that form the foundation of a strong civic culture. Democracy depends on these mediating institutions — the voice of an informed citizenry, which link citizens to their government and one another by providing avenues for participation in public policy.

**Safeguard Elections:** NDI promotes open and democratic elections. Political parties and governments have asked NDI to study electoral codes and recommend improvements. The Institute also provides technical assistance for political parties and civic groups to conduct voter education campaigns and organize election monitoring programs. NDI is a world leader in election monitoring, having organized international delegations to monitor elections in dozens of countries, helping to ensure that polling results reflect the will of the people.

**Promote Openness and Accountability:** NDI responds to requests from leaders of government, parliament, political parties, and civic groups seeking advice on matters from legislative procedures to constituent service to the balance of civil-military relations in a democracy. NDI works to build legislatures and local governments that are professional, accountable, open, and responsive to their citizens.

International cooperation is key to promoting democracy effectively and efficiently. It also conveys a deeper message to new and emerging democracies that while autocracies are inherently isolated and fearful of the outside world, democracies can count on international allies and an active support system. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., with field offices in every region of the world, NDI complements the skills of its staff by enlisting volunteer experts from around the world, many of whom are veterans of democratic struggles in their own countries and share valuable perspectives on democratic development.

## OBSERVING THE 1998-99 NIGERIA ELECTIONS

## ABOUT THE CARTER CENTER

The Carter Center strives to relieve suffering by advancing peace and health worldwide. With a fundamental commitment to human rights, the Center is guided by the principle that people, with the necessary skills, knowledge, and access to resources, can improve their own lives and the lives of others.

Founded in 1982 by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in partnership with Emory University, the nonprofit Center works to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health. The Center collaborates with other organizations, public or private, in carrying out its mission. In this way, the Center has touched the lives of people in more than 65 countries.

Charitable contributions from individuals, foundations, corporations, and other donors support the Center's activities. Programs are directed by resident experts or fellows. They design

pavilions house offices for the former president and first lady and most of the Center's program staff. The complex includes the Ivan Allen III Pavilion and the nondenomina-

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are known collectively as The Carter Presidential Center.

More information about The Carter Center is available on the World Wide Web at [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org). ■



PAUL DINGMAN

*The Carter Center is located in a 35-acre park, two miles east of downtown Atlanta.*

and implement activities in cooperation with President and Mrs. Carter, networks of world leaders, and partners in the United States and abroad.

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