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PATHWAYS TO FREEDOM: CHAPTER PREVIEW

Nigeria

Political and Economic Lessons From Democratic Transitions

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Overview

In 1960, when the British abruptly brought Nigeria to independence, its social and economic development was comparable to that of Taiwan or Malaysia. Now, following generations of bad governance and an economy distorted by oil, Nigeria is near the bottom of most human development indices. Sixty-nine percent of the population lives on less than \$1 a day.

Starting in 1966, military coups undermined civilian institutions and marginalized or destroyed the late-colonial political elite. The secession of Biafra in 1967 sparked a three-year civil war that left at least a million dead, mostly from famine and disease, before the military reintegrated Biafra into the federation.

Nigeria's military governments were largely unaccountable to the population and failed to address social and economic issues. Corruption and the focus on oil, which began to produce previously unimaginable riches for a small elite around 1970, siphoned off resources, crowded out investment in other sectors, and caused much of the rest of the economy to atrophy.

Nigeria began its democratic transition in 1999, following the unexpected death of military dictator Sani Abacha. A small group of army officers and their civilian allies, motivated by a desire to distance themselves from Abacha's excesses, orchestrated a move from military to civilian control of the government. Their goal, largely achieved, was to introduce democratic forms but preserve their personal power and wealth.

Although it marked the end of gross human-rights abuses, Nigeria's transition was halting from the beginning. Despite institutional changes, politics continued to be shaped by patronage, client relationships, and elite competition. The country's post-Abacha constitution affirmed a federal system with power divided among branches of government at the federal and state levels. Although intended to reverse the military's centralization of authority, the constitution has failed to do so.

"Election-like events" have also been manipulated by elites and failed to establish meaningful accountability to voters. Between 1999 and 2007, each election was worse than its predecessor, with widespread, blatant rigging. (The 2011 election represented a slight improvement.)

Conscious of ethnic and religious divisions, the transition's architects reaffirmed the principle of "zoning," or presidential-candidate alternation, within the ruling party. If the president was southern and Christian, his vice president would be a northern Muslim, and vice versa. The arrangement persisted until 2011, when President Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian, ran for president even though it was still the North's turn. Jonathan had taken over from his predecessor, the northern Muslim Umaru Yar'Adua, upon Yar'Adua's death in 2010. Jonathan's election victory precipitated the bloodiest post-electoral rioting since independence in the predominantly Muslim northern states.

Still, elections are slowly promoting a more democratic culture. Today, the expectation, if not yet the principle, is that the chief of state will be a civilian who comes to office through a process that involves voting. If the transition to democracy is incomplete, that of military to civilian governance is further along.

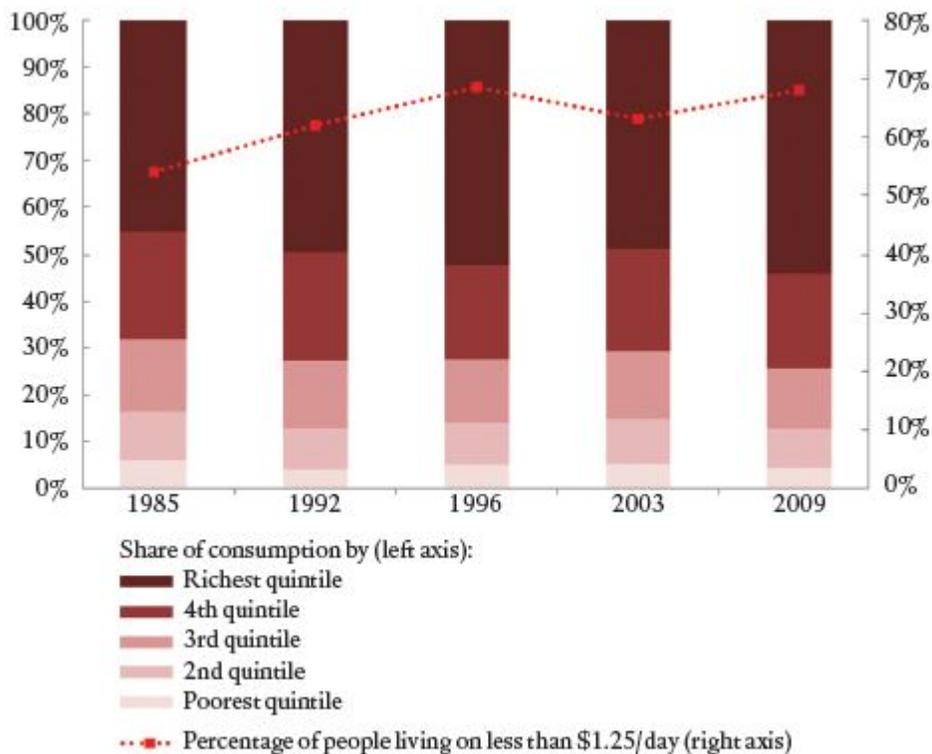
Pathways to Freedom: Political and Economic Lessons From Democratic Transitions, a new book from the Council on Foreign Relations, explores Nigeria's progress and challenges in six areas of economic, political, and social development.

SOCIOECONOMIC EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

Since independence, no national government has successfully addressed poverty and gross inequality. Free from organized challenge, elites have continued to profit from their hold on power and failed to address basic needs. Weak institutions and erratic funding dependent on petroleum revenues have also limited the implementation of development strategies.

Aside from elites, most Nigerians are powerless and poor. The country's Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality on a 0-to-100 scale, rose from an already-high 38.7 in 1985 to 48.8 in 2009, some eight points higher than in Russia. This gulf between the wealthy elites and almost everyone else is probably Nigeria's most significant division.

POVERTY AND CONSUMPTION IN NIGERIA

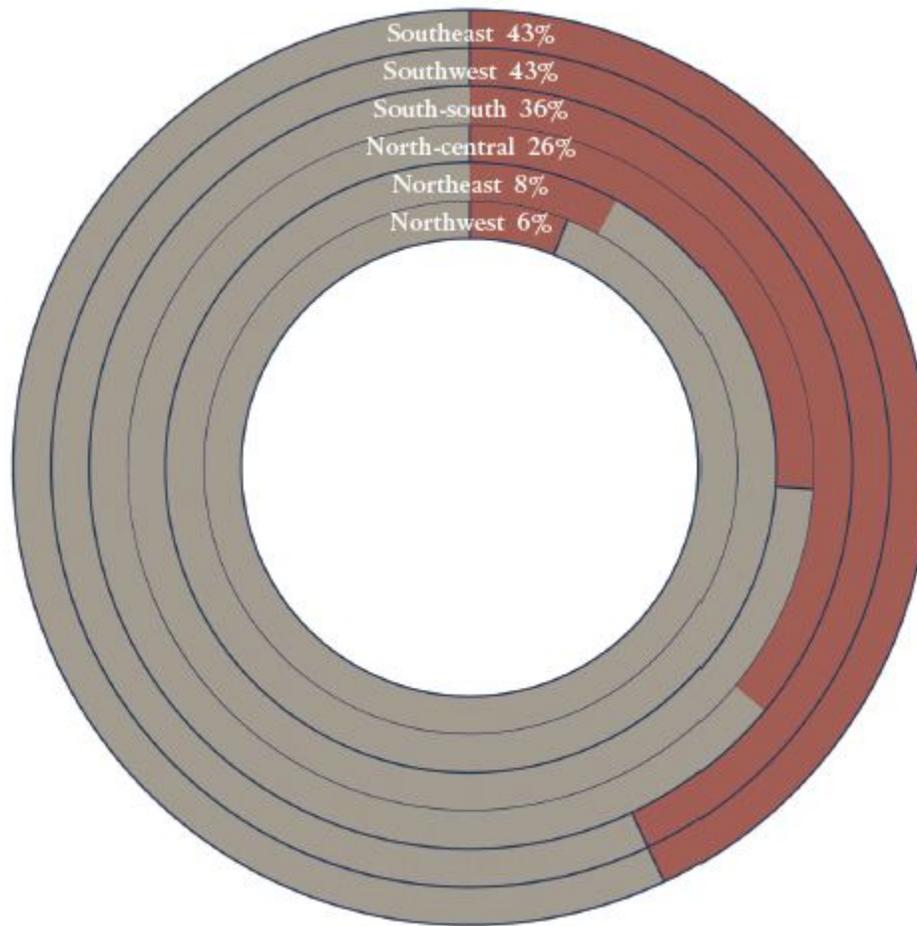


Source: World Bank (poverty data: purchasing power parity, 2005 international dollars).

Social and economic disparities also persist between the North and the South. With modern education, trading opportunities, and, later, oil, the South developed more quickly. One indicator is the 2010 primary-school attendance rate: in the northern state of Zamfara it was 18 percent, in the southern state of Anambra, 86 percent. Unemployed youth, a problem everywhere, are particularly so in the North and provide the foot soldiers for radical Islamic movements such as Boko Haram.

Some observers see a middle-class revival in Nigeria, noting the country's ninety million mobile phone subscriptions and well-stocked shopping centers, though only in Lagos and Abuja. But the middle class is invisible outside these cities, and—except possibly in Lagos—it remains too small to demand more transparency and accountability.

REGIONAL HEALTH DISPARITIES IN NIGERIA



■ Eighteen- to twenty-three-month-olds who have had every basic vaccination

Source: 2008 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND POLICIES

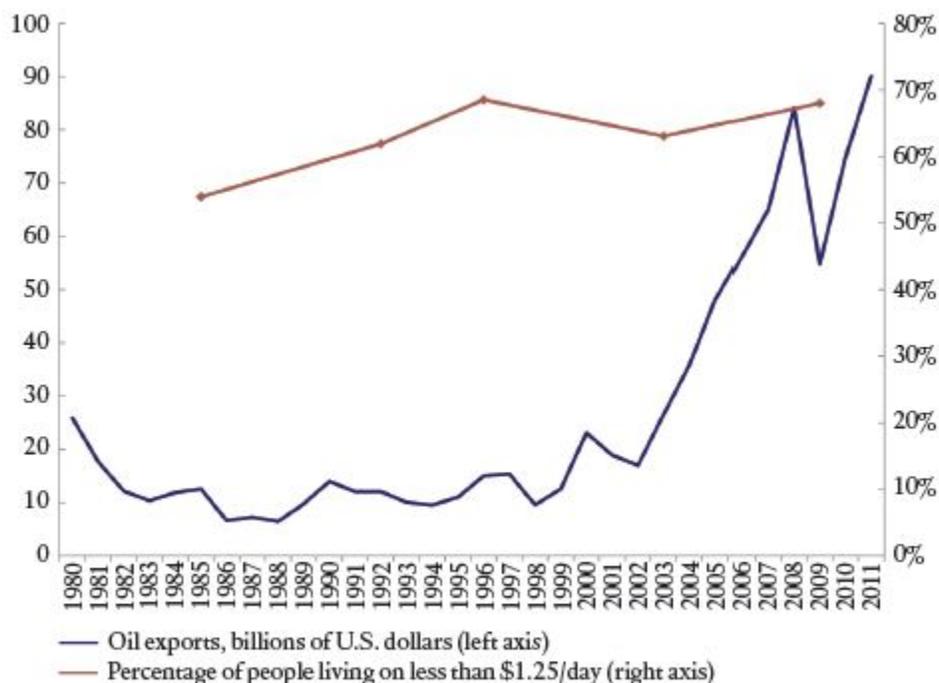
At independence, Nigeria was the breadbasket of West Africa. Agriculture, mining, palm oil, and industry were important components of the economy. Trade was growing and Nigeria exported goods over a regional rail network. Today, most of that is gone for reasons ranging from misguided agricultural marketing policies to inadequate power generation and failing infrastructure.

Instead, oil dominates Nigeria's economy. By 2009, oil and gas exports amounted to more than 95 percent of export earnings and more than 80 percent of federal revenue. Elites depend on oil funds for their well-being, giving them little incentive to promote a diversified economy. Most of the feder-

al government's share of oil revenue is consumed by day-to-day operations or simply disappears. Members of the National Assembly receive more than \$1 million per year in salary and allowances.

Despite its production of crude, Nigeria has to import refined oil and gasoline. Its refineries, all state owned, have rarely functioned at the same time, due to underinvestment and maintenance issues. The government also subsidizes fuel for home use, an expense that amounted to almost a quarter of the federal budget by 2012. Many Nigerians view the subsidy as their only tangible benefit from the country's oil. Arguing that the funds could be better spent on economic development, President Jonathan tried to abolish the subsidy in early 2012. But this led to widespread unrest and Jonathan restored about half the subsidy.

OIL EXPORTS AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA



Source: World Bank (poverty data: purchasing power parity, 2005 international dollars).

CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA

Civil society and the media have positively influenced Nigeria's transition by encouraging the growth of a more democratic culture. However, civil society is probably more fragmented now than under the military, when it was united to restore civilian government.

Civil organizations did play a strong role as election observers in 2011, likely contributing to improvements over previous elections. The Nigerian Bar Association was a leading participant, with some 55,000 educated members across the country. The Occupy Nigeria movement, which began as a small, generalized protest and mushroomed after President Jonathan tried to eliminate the fuel subsidy, also recently showed that civil society could—if only briefly—overcome public apathy and the divisions that have inhibited true reform.

In the media realm, military governments often sought to suppress news stories they did not like. Since the restoration of civilian government, the media has officially been free. While television is

mostly an elite medium, radio reaches nearly everyone. Print media, too, is published without state interference. However, international advocacy groups have shown that journalists are regularly subjected to intimidation and even murder. Though this appears to be perpetrated by local elites and not the government, the state habitually fails to prosecute, convict, and punish those responsible.

LEGAL SYSTEM AND RULE OF LAW

Three legal systems operate in Nigeria: the legal code inherited from the British; customary law that varies by ethnic group; and sharia law, which applies in the twelve predominately Muslim states. The latter two are popular for their relative speed and affordability in resolving cases. The penalties of sharia law, however, are suffered most often by the poor and virtually never by the rich. Radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram decry what they call political sharia, where small thieves are punished while government contractors get away with massive fraud.

Nigeria's widely hated police contribute to a culture of impunity, which promotes a feedback loop of popular antipathy to government authority. Training levels and pay are low, regularly leading the police to extort money from citizens. This combination of multiple legal systems, a weak rule of law, and a culture of impunity encourages lawlessness and inhibits foreign investment—except in oil.

GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND DIVISION OF POWER

Despite the post-Abacha constitution's federal character, the division of power across central, state, and local governments has been more aspirational than real. Indeed, a civilian president's power may be less circumscribed than that of former military leaders.

State and local governments depend on the federal government for oil revenue, allocated to governors according to a formula. Governors and local leaders, in turn, dole out patronage with no accountability. Because they pay few if any taxes and many receive minor monetary benefits from the government, citizens appear reluctant to hold public officials accountable. Only the state of Lagos collects taxes to fund its operations effectively. Something approaching a civil contract is emerging there in which citizens receive meaningful services in return for their taxes.

EDUCATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

Nigeria's current population may be as high as 165 million, and some project that it could reach 400 million within two generations. Urbanization is proceeding rapidly. Nigerians are proud of their population size, and both Muslims and Christians have large families. Although condoms are commonly available and affordable, no national policy exists to limit population growth.

Starting in the late 1970s, governments moved to make primary education universally available and to vastly expand the university system. Alas, they starved education at all levels of funds, partly because fluctuating oil prices wreaked havoc on government finances.

Today, literacy levels remain low, especially in the North, where in some places only 20 percent of women can read. Schools usually charge fees and require uniforms, posing hardships for many families. Educational quality is also poor thanks to underfunding and overcrowding. With a lack of decent alternatives, Nigerians are increasingly turning to private education. Even if it is expensive and lim-

ited to a small proportion of the population, its example is proving salutary in developing higher expectations for state schools.

CONCLUSION

Given its ethnic and religious divisions, a weak sense of national identity, and exploitative elites, it is no surprise that Nigeria's transition to democracy since 1999 has been incomplete. There has been more continuity than change from the days of military rule, and the gulf between those with power and those they govern remains vast. Still, Nigeria's political culture—if not its governance—is more democratic today than before, and its rulers are civilians rather than military officers. That is progress, if not democracy.

Timeline

1960: Nigeria Gains Independence

Nigeria achieves independence from the United Kingdom on October 1. The nation—its name and its identity—are British creations. No precolonial cultural unity had held sway in the region. Indeed, Nigeria is divided into three large ethnic and linguistic groups—Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo—and more than three hundred small ones. In 1960, observers rated Nigeria's social and economic development as comparable to that of Taiwan or Malaysia. Now, following generations of bad governance and an economy distorted by oil, it is one of the poorest countries in the world and near the bottom of most human development indices.

1967: Biafra Secedes, Triggering War

Military coups starting in 1966 undermine civilian institutions and marginalize or destroy the late-colonial political elite. Pogroms in the north target nonindigenous ethnic groups and Christians, especially Igbos. These incidents become the pretext for the secession of Biafra, the Igbo-dominated southeastern part of the country, from Nigeria in May 1967. A civil war ensues in July and lasts until January 1970, with fierce fighting between Biafran rebels and Nigerian forces. At least one million people die in the conflict, mostly from famine and disease, before the military reincorporates Biafra into the Nigerian federation.

1970: Oil Production Begins to Climb

Although oil had been discovered before independence, it is only after 1970 that production booms, bringing Nigeria unimaginable riches but also distorting its economy. Over the decades, Nigeria becomes a major African and global oil producer. Though production varies, it generally rises from about 1.5 million barrels per day in 1971 to more than 2.5 million barrels per day by 2011, making Nigeria the world's twelfth-largest producer that year.

1993: Abacha Begins Brutal Military Rule

A string of military governments that rule Nigeria for decades—brief interregnums aside—culminates in the brutal dictatorship of General Sani Abacha. After seizing power in 1993, Abacha dissolves state institutions, prosecutes activists and others, and commits gross human rights violations. The brutality of his regime makes Nigeria an international outcast.

1999: Military Restores Civilian Authority, New Constitution Adopted

Following General Abacha's death in June 1998, a small group of army officers and their civilian allies begin a move from military to civilian control of the government framed by democratic rhetoric. They are motivated by a desire to end Nigeria's international pariah status and to distance themselves from the excesses of the Abacha years. Their goal, largely achieved, is to introduce democratic forms but preserve their personal power and wealth. The transition culminates in a presidential election on February 27, when elites orchestrate the victory of the southern Christian and former military leader Olusegun Obasanjo. The

election affirms the principle of “zoning,” which ensures that the presidency will rotate between the predominately Christian south and the predominately Muslim north. Meanwhile, a new constitution that mimics the form but not the substance of the American one is adopted in May. It establishes a federal system, though it fails to prevent the continued accretion of presidential power.

2006: Oil-Related Attacks Spark International Concern

Attacks on foreign oil workers and oil facilities in the Niger Delta increase in 2006, depressing Nigeria’s oil output by some 25 percent and garnering international attention. The delta has been the scene of recurring insurrection for over a generation because of grievances about the distribution of oil revenue. An amnesty program for militants in June 2009 attempts to stop the attacks, but the prospect of further violence persists. Kidnapping and attacks on oil facilities are again on the upswing in 2012.

2007: Yar’Adua Wins Presidential Election

Per the zoning principle, the northern Muslim leader Umaru Yar’Adua of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) comes into power in the April 21 presidential election. Opposition figures and international observers condemn the vote as fraudulent, with opposition candidates calling for a new election. However, outgoing president Olusegun Obasanjo urges Nigerians to accept the results, and Yar’Adua takes power.

2008: Nigeria Reaches Lower-Middle-Income Status

The World Bank moves Nigeria from low- to lower-middle-income status as its GDP per capita reaches \$1,375. The move comes after years of robust growth, fueled largely by Nigeria’s vast supplies of oil. The country earns some \$84 billion, or about 40 percent of GDP, from oil exports in 2008 as crude trades above \$100 per barrel for the first time ever. However, poverty rates remain high. Some 68 percent of Nigerians live on less than \$1.25 per day in 2009, about the same as in 1996 and up from 54 percent in 1985.

2010: Jonathan Becomes President, Ends Zoning

President Yar’Adua dies in office on May 6, making his vice president, the southern Christian Goodluck Jonathan, the chief of state. Initially, Jonathan indicates that he will not run for president in the April 2011 election because, under the zoning pattern of an eight-year rotation, it is still the north’s turn. But he changes his mind and, using the powers of incumbency, ends zoning. Some of Jonathan’s supporters justify the move as a step toward democracy because it no longer restricts the presidency to a particular region according to a set time frame. But Jonathan’s defeat of a northern Muslim opposition candidate precipitates the bloodiest postelectoral rioting in the predominately Muslim northern states since independence.

2011: Militant Attacks Increase

In the Muslim northern half of the country, an insurrection, often referred to as Boko Haram, intensifies against the perceived secular government in Abuja in 2011. In December,

President Jonathan announces a state of emergency in four regions of the country because of violence by Boko Haram.

2012: Mass Demonstrations Erupt

Popular demonstrations and union strikes erupt in January after President Jonathan's decision to end fuel subsidies. The Nigerian government argues that removing the subsidies, which cost almost a quarter of the federal budget, will provide increased revenue for economic development. The price of fuel roughly doubles, and many citizens feel that the only benefit they see from the country's oil wealth is gone. Trade unions join other protesters and spark a general strike, largely shutting down Nigeria's economy for a week. President Jonathan reinstates about half the fuel subsidy and reaches a settlement with the trade unions while also arresting some of the demonstrators.

Further Reading

Campbell, John. *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

A book examining the history of postcolonial Nigeria and the factors, such as oil, corruption, and elite behavior, behind the country's daunting troubles.

Campbell, John. "Nigeria's Battle for Stability." *National Interest*, no. 118 (2012): 31–39.

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Enwerem, Iheanyi M. *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria: BookBuilders, 2010.

A book on the structure and role of Nigeria's Catholic Church.

Everyone's in on the Game: Corruption and Human Rights Abuses by the Nigeria Police Force. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011.

A report analyzing the role and practices of Nigerian security forces, as well as atrocities committed by Boko Haram.

Herskovits, Jean. "Reflections on Fifty Years of Change in Nigeria."

Speech delivered at the Coventry University African Studies Center/Chatham House Africa Program Conference, November 2010.

A speech reviewing Nigeria's history since independence, focusing on its political structure and institutions.

Kwaja, Chris. *Nigeria's Pernicious Drivers of Ethno-Religious Conflict*. Washington, DC: African Center for Strategic Studies, 2011.

A report that focuses on the causes of Nigeria's ethnic strife and proposes reforms to address them.

Lewis, Peter M. *Nigeria: Assessing Risks to Stability*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2011.

A report, part of a series commissioned by the U.S. Africa Command, that gauges the prospect of instability in Nigeria and outlines scenarios for its future.

Maier, Karl. *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

A book that explores Nigeria's constellation of political, socioeconomic, and security challenges.

Osaghae, Eghosa E. *The Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998.

A book that analyzes Nigeria's political and economic dynamics and advances external causes for the country's difficulties.

Paden, John N. *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005.

A book on the issues surrounding Nigeria's attempt to build a federal democracy and modern rule of law compatible with its Islamic and other traditions.

Paden, John N. *Postelection Conflict Management in Nigeria: The Challenges of National Unity*. Arlington, VA: George Mason University School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, 2012.

A monograph with analysis and recommendations on the security challenges facing Nigeria in the aftermath of its 2011 presidential election.

Sayne, Aaron. *Climate Change Adaptation and Conflict in Nigeria*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2011.

A report reviewing the prospects for climate-related conflict in Nigeria and outlining climate adaptation measures.

Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2012.

A report analyzing the role and practices of Nigerian security forces, as well as atrocities committed by Boko Haram.

Walker, Andrew. *What Is Boko Haram?* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012.

A report with background information and analysis on the militant Islamic group and policy suggestions for countering it.