

*Attitudes Toward Democracy
and Markets in Nigeria:
Report of a National Opinion Survey
January-February 2000*

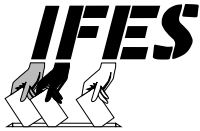
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Nigeria: Attitudes Toward Democracy And Markets in Nigeria, Report of a National Opinion Survey

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Executive Summary

A national sample survey on “Attitudes toward Democracy and Markets” was conducted in Nigeria in January-February 2000 by the International Foundation for Election Systems, in collaboration with Management Systems International. Research and Marketing Services, based in Lagos, conducted the fieldwork, assisted with the sampling methods and processed questionnaire data. Drs. Peter Lewis (American University) and Michael Bratton (Michigan State University) directed survey design, oversaw implementation and analyzed survey results. Funding for the survey was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The survey covered all six informal geopolitical regions of the country, including 22 of the 36 states. In all 3,603 Nigerians of voting age were interviewed to find out what ordinary Nigerians think about recent political and economic developments. This was a representative sample of the Nigerian population.

With regard to general attitudes to democracy, the survey showed that citizens:

- **Strongly support democracy.** An overwhelming majority (80.9 percent) think that “Democracy is preferable to any other form of government.”
- **See democracy in liberal terms.** The most common definitions include “government by the people” (38.0 percent), political rights and elections (14.0 percent) or civil liberties (13.8 percent).
- **Accept democratic values.** A clear majority believe in freedom of expression (75.3 percent), universal voting rights (73.1 percent), and constitutional principle (67.3 percent), while 79.2 percent reject the use of violence for political ends.
- **Reject non-democratic alternatives.** 90 percent of Nigerians reject the proposition that “the army should come in to govern the country,” and similar majorities decline the notion of single party rule or government by a personal strongman.

Considering democratic performance, Nigerians:

- **Are satisfied with the state of Nigerian democracy.** More than 80 percent express relative satisfaction with the workings of democracy in Nigeria today, and over 95 percent believe that Nigeria qualifies as a democracy, despite its problems.
- **Expect both political and economic benefits from democracy.** Nigerians highly prize many basic political rights and freedoms associated with democracy, yet they equally value economic goods such as poverty reduction and the delivery of social services.
- **See significant improvements in their political conditions under democracy.** Compared with the former military regime, a majority perceive a better environment for freedom of speech (88.9 percent), freedom of political affiliation (85.4 percent), and open electoral choice (86.4 percent).
- **Have confidence in institutions and elected officials.** More than 60 percent of citizens express trust for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and 76.4 percent believe that the presidential election was conducted honestly. Clear majorities favorably assess the performance of local governments, state governors, state assemblies and the National Assembly.
- **Approve of the current government's performance:** 82 percent rate the Obasanjo government's performance positively.

Concerning popular expectations, the survey indicates that people:

- **Have high expectations of the current regime.** Nearly 87 percent of Nigerians expect to be more satisfied with their lives in a year's time, and 71 percent expect the government to fulfill its promises within four years.
- **Nonetheless show patience with democracy.** Four out of five respondents believe that democracy can handle the nation's problems even if it takes time; only 16.4 percent would contemplate another form of government if democracy doesn't produce results soon.

Turning to attitudes on the economy, Nigerians:

- **Support a significant role for government in the economy.** 55.5 percent believe that government, rather than individuals, should mainly be responsible for popular welfare, and a similar majority support government provision of jobs. A majority of Nigerians are inclined against public sector retrenchment or privatization.
- **Also see an important role for markets and the private sector.** A majority of respondents endorse the ideas of free markets for land, open pricing in consumer markets, user fees for better quality social services, and foreign investment in Nigeria's economy.

Regarding economic reform, citizens:

- **Have limited knowledge of reform policies.** Only 40.3 percent of Nigerians can identify the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) by name. Even fewer can describe its purpose.
- **Are dissatisfied with the performance of the SAP.** Among those familiar with the reform program, two-thirds express some dissatisfaction and 60 percent believe that the program has benefited a narrow group in society while harming average Nigerians.
- **Nonetheless approve of government's handling of the economy.** A majority of respondents approve of the Obasanjo government's management of inflation, employment, social services, food security, and (especially) corruption.
- **View inequality as a continuing problem.** Only 39.5 percent approve of the government's efforts to reduce income gaps. And a majority believe that major policies have been inequitable.

Considering the relationship between political and economic reform:

- **There is no clear association between political and economic liberalism.** While a majority of Nigerians support democracy, they hold more diverse opinions on the economy, and strong democrats are not necessarily free marketeers. Overall, the proportion of Nigerians committed to democracy (80.9 percent) is greater than the proportion favoring a strong economic role for government (55.5 percent).
- **Nigerians are far less satisfied with the economy than with democracy.** While satisfaction with democracy is over 84 percent, only 44.9 percent are relatively satisfied with the state of the economy. Even among those least satisfied with the economy, however, support for democracy remains high.
- **The public wants change, but is inclined to be patient.** Whereas 49.1 percent of survey respondents think that the government should "change its economic policies (now)," only 16.4 percent want "to try another form of government" (if democracy doesn't deliver results).

In the area of the rule of law, Nigerians:

- **See pervasive corruption.** 94.0 percent of those interviewed perceive some corruption, including 52.8 percent who believe that people “always” bribe officials. Almost three-fourths of respondents disagree with the statement that “Bribery is not common among public officials in Nigeria.”
- **See improvements under the new government.** A large majority (82.6) percent agree that “Corruption was a worse problem under the old military government than these days.”
- **Are concerned about crime, but feel things are getting better.** Around 40 percent of those interviewed say they know someone else who had been a crime victim within the past two years. Most Nigerians sense improvements in recent years, as 58.3 percent say they feel safer today than they did five years ago.
- **Have limited trust for law enforcement authorities.** A majority (51.7 percent) of respondents express no trust “at all” for the police, and another 18.4 percent profess some distrust. By comparison, courts of law evoke greater confidence, as 53.0 percent express a degree of trust.

Regarding civil society and social capital:

- **Nigerians show high levels of civic membership:** 86.2 percent of respondents report that they are members in some type of association (mainly religious ones), including 23.6 percent who claim leadership positions in these organizations.
- **Citizens also display varying degrees of social trust.** A little more than half of respondents profess trust for other ethnic groups, while two-thirds trust their own ethnic group, and 85 percent trust their kin.

The survey also probed questions of identity; among the findings:

- **Ethnicity is the strongest type of identity among Nigerians.** Almost half of all Nigerians (48.2 percent) choose to tag themselves with an “ethnic” identity, compared to almost one-third (28.4 percent) who opt for “class” or occupational identities. The next most common category is a religious identity, chosen by 21.0 percent.
- **There are regional variations in group identity,** as northern Muslims more frequently identify themselves in religious terms, while southern residents often choose ethnic or occupational categories.
- **Group feelings are strongly held:** Overwhelming proportions of Nigerians agree that they “feel proud” to belong to their group (96.8 percent) and assert that they would “want their children to think of themselves” with the same identity (89.5 percent).
- **National identity is also strong.** Fully 97.2 percent of respondents agree that they are “proud to call themselves Nigerian,” and they feel just as strongly about this national identity as about their sub-national, group identity.
- **General feelings of group deprivation are limited.** Overall, relatively few Nigerians (11.7 percent) feel that the economic conditions of their group are “worse than the economic conditions of other groups in the country.” For some groups, however, such as the Ijaw of the Niger Delta, feelings of relative deprivation are more pronounced (32 percent).

The survey also found significant regional variations in attitudes:

- **There are modest regional differences in economic attitudes.** While northern and southern citizens show few differences in attitudes to the SAP, those in the north are somewhat more supportive of government ownership and more wary of foreign investment. Southerners stress government employment, but also entrepreneurship.
- **Some regional variations in political attitudes are evident.** Southerners place high value on democratic ideals, yet they are relatively more critical of democracy in practice, and more likely to be disaffected from government. Those in the north, while strongly supporting democracy, are relatively more inclined to defer to authority and support the government of the day.

Introduction

The Political and Economic Setting

Nigeria's recent political transition opens a new chapter in the nation's quest for democratic governance. During the past three decades, Nigeria has been ruled chiefly by the military, with only a brief civilian hiatus during the Second Republic. Throughout a turbulent political history, Nigerians have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to democracy as the ideal system for governing the country. Nearly every military leader has espoused an intention to restore democracy, and several have arranged elaborate programs of political transition. Throughout the cycles of civilian and military governance, a vibrant press has served as a forum for the expression of political values and aspirations. The academic community, professional groupings, and a range of popular associations have also nourished democratic desires. As a principle, democracy has a firm foundation in the national conscience.

After years of military dictatorship, prodigious official corruption, and growing social strains, many Nigerians welcomed the advent of democracy in 1999 as an opportunity to move forward in the course of political development. The new democratic regime headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo confronts a daunting array of challenges. The consolidation of democratic rule raises needs for establishing new institutions, developing effective political procedures, and addressing numerous policy problems. An especially pressing issue is the country's frail economy. In recent years weak global markets, chronic mismanagement, and endemic corruption have fostered economic malaise. Much of the Nigerian public anticipates that better governance should be reflected in improved economic conditions, yet there are different popular visions of the route that the Nigerian economy should follow. In an important sense, Nigeria's political transition is not only a test of democracy, but also an opening for economic recovery. The related paths of political and economic reform are essential to the country's future, and this survey seeks a better understanding of these concerns.

Background to the Survey

If democracy is "government by the people," then a reliable means is needed to know what "the people" want. Elections can help, but only if they are freely and fairly conducted and then only once every several years. In the interim, political elites can all too easily claim to speak on behalf of "the people," while the public's views might not be heard or respected. For various reasons, public opinion has been a neglected force in Nigerian politics. Most obviously, military governments have stifled the free expression of political views and trampled on the rights of the media. Despite these constraints, a few efforts to measure popular attitudes have pointed to a more diverse field of opinion and a resilient democratic culture (Peil, 1976; Beckett and Alli, 1995).

Public opinion is an important component of democracy, a force that can either provide support and legitimacy for government or call leaders to account. The consolidation of democracy requires a means for tracking citizens' political and economic attitudes and reporting them widely. When given full expression, the opinions of an active citizenry can help make decision-makers more responsive, and can guide the actions of political parties and associations.

Public opinion is commonly measured by sample surveys. If scientifically designed and carefully

administered, sample surveys are a powerful tool for revealing, among other things, the level of popular support for democracy and the citizens' assessments of the performance of the government of the day. Surveys can also report on differences of opinion among people of different social backgrounds.

The purpose of the present study is to find out what ordinary Nigerians think about recent political and economic developments. As a guiding theme, we asked: "Do Nigerians support democracy and markets?" The study was designed as a national sample survey, meaning that we posed the same set of questions to a small sample of the population who were selected to represent the adult population of Nigeria as a whole. The target population for the survey was citizens of Nigeria, namely persons at least 18 years old and eligible to vote. To draw a representative cross-section of the voting age population, a random sample was designed.

The survey covered all six informal geopolitical regions of the country, including 22 of the 36 states, with the number of interviews in each region being proportional to the region's population size. To adapt the questionnaire to local conditions, we translated the English version into six local languages: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, Tiv, and Ijaw. All interviews were administered in the language of the respondent's choice. The survey questionnaire reproduced several items that had been asked in previous surveys in Nigeria and in other countries, so as to provide a basis for comparing Nigeria with other African nations as well as other regions of the world.¹

A summary of the social background of the sample is presented in the following table:

Figure 1. Social and Economic Characteristics of the Sample

Number of People Surveyed	3,603	Languages (total no.)	85+
Male/Female Ratio	50% male, 50% female	Hausa	31.5%
Median Age	29	Yoruba	25.5%
Urban/Rural Division	42.7% urban, 57.3% rural	Igbo	16.7%
Education		Income	
No schooling	25.3%	No earnings (students, dependents, etc.)	14.6%
Primary only	17.0%	Less than 5,000 naira/month	72.4%
Secondary only	37.0%	More than 30,000 naira/month	2.0%
Post-Secondary	20.7%	Financial Situation	
No formal schooling (Christians)	6.8%	Save money	21.1%
No formal schooling (Muslims)	47.5%	Break even (i.e. spend all earnings)	52.1%
Occupation		Spend savings and/or borrow	26.4%
Informal marketer	18.6%	Basic Necessities	
Student	15.3%	(Percentage of people with some difficulty obtaining these needs)	
Farmer/fisherman	13.4%	Food	41.3%
Housewife	12.8%	("frequently" or "always")	5.6%
Artisan	10.5%	Water for domestic use	59.5%
Businessperson	6.2%	("frequently" or "always")	24.6%
Government employee	5.6%	Schooling	29.8%
Unemployed (currently)	5.9%	Health care	36.1%
Unemployed within last year	35.4%		

The following discussion focuses mainly on results from the national sample as a whole. In the course of our analysis, we have considered the effects of different factors such as education, age, income, rural/urban residence, and gender on attitudes. In many instances, these factors did not meaningfully influence opinions, and so we report only the overall (national) results. In the later sections of the paper, we consider the influences of social identity, region, and education on attitudes.

Attitudes Toward Democracy

Support for Democracy

One point of departure for understanding citizens' attitudes is to gauge their estimation for democracy as an ideal system of governance. This basic political value provides perspective on other assessments of democratic performance, and the effectiveness of leaders or institutions.

Nigerians generally show a pronounced commitment to democracy. An overwhelming majority (80.9 percent) of those interviewed agree that "Democracy is preferable to any other form of government," while much smaller proportions believe that "In certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable" (9.2 percent) or "To people like me, it doesn't matter what form of government we have" (9.6 percent). Citizens display a clear commitment to democratic government, forgoing non-democratic alternatives or expressions of apathy.

Figure 2. Attractiveness of Democracy

Democracy is preferable to any other form of government	81%
In certain situation, a non-democratic government can be preferable	9%
To people like me, it doesn't matter what form of government we have	10%

Comparatively, this suggests that democratic commitments currently run higher in Nigeria than in many other new democracies (in Africa and elsewhere). In January 2000, Nigerians agreed with the statement that "democracy is preferable" at higher rates than in recent surveys in Ghana in 1999 (74 percent), Zambia in 1996 (63 percent) and South Africa in 1997 (56 percent). Democratic preferences in Nigeria also exceed those of such countries as Brazil (41 percent) and the Czech Republic (77 percent). Only southern European countries such as Greece (90 percent) exceed the magnitude of the Nigerian response (Bratton and Mattes, 1999).

This attachment to democracy is affirmed by Nigerians' comparative evaluations of alternative political regimes. Respondents were asked to "grade" different systems of government on a scale from 1 (least favorable) to 10 (most favorable). Here too, Nigerians display a strong preference for democracy and high expectations about future governance. The present system of government ("with free elections and many parties") earned a mean score of 7.53. The former military system, by contrast, earned a mean score of 2.53. In addition, Nigerians were asked to speculate about governance in five years time, and they display considerable optimism, providing an impressive mean score of 8.95. Thus, there is a marked contrast between the harsh assessments of preceding military governments and the high hopes invested in the new system.

Figure 3. Ratings for Different Systems of Government (mean score, scale 1-10)

Present system of elections and many parties	7.53
Military rule	2.53
System you expect Nigeria to have in five years	8.95
Former colonial system	4.1
System of traditional rulers	4.03

Nigerians generally view democracy in conventional liberal terms. When asked to express their understanding of democracy, nearly two-thirds of respondents offer definitions that emphasized political freedoms and procedures, including “government by the people” (38 percent), political rights and elections (14 percent), or civil liberties (13.8 percent). A significant proportion defines democracy in more neutral terms as “civilian politics” (16.8 percent), while about 10 percent provide substantive values such as peace, social and economic development, or equality and justice. Fewer than 1 percent of those interviewed associate democracy with such negative terms as corruption, conflict and confusion, economic hardship, or government of the rich. Thus, much of the public holds a positive view of democracy, and sees it as a system of liberties, laws, or popular voice.

Conditional Support for Democracy

How deeply are Nigerians attached to the values of democracy, and how substantial is their resolve to defend these new institutions? If there is weak commitment to core features of democratic politics, or considerable tolerance for non-democratic alternatives, then a fledgling democracy might be more vulnerable to “illiberal” pressures or even reversal (Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993; Zakaria, 1997; Rose et al, 1998).

Overall, in Nigeria there appear to be clear and consistent preferences for democratic values and behavior. For instance, nearly three-fourths of respondents support freedom of expression for people with different views, and reject the idea that diverse opinions are “dangerous and confusing.”

A similar majority (73.1 percent) believe in full voting rights for all citizens, regardless of education. Although Nigeria has frequently been troubled by political violence, those interviewed voice a sound rejection (79.2 percent) of violence as a means toward political goals. Moreover, there is a strong belief in constitutionalism, as 78.8 percent agree (67.3 percent strongly) that “the President should obey the Constitution,” and should not have leeway to change the Constitution at will.

These affirmations of democratic values are complemented by a clear dismissal of various non-democratic directions in politics. Fully 90 percent of respondents disagree (70 percent strongly) that “The army should come in to govern the country.” This response is complemented by expressions of suspicion toward the army as an institution. When asked about their relative trust of the army, only 36.9 percent of respondents are somewhat trustful, while 62.1 percent express a degree of mistrust, and fully 39 percent do not trust the army “at all.” This confirms the perception that protracted army rule, and the repression and corruption under recent dictatorships, have tarnished the reputation of the military.

There is also an objection (88.4 percent) to the possibility of single party rule, or the notion that elections should be scrapped so that “a strong leader can decide everything” (83.5 percent

disagree). In one area, however, Nigerians appear willing to defer to those in authority, as 58.8 percent register some agreement that “The most important decisions, for example on the economy, should be left to experts.” This suggests that in some areas of governance, especially technical areas such as macro-economic reform, citizens do not feel a sense of efficacy and are willing to delegate authority to elites.

In view of past limitations on political and civil rights in Nigeria, citizens were asked how they might react to future infringements of basic liberties. Options ranged from doing nothing, to supporting the government, contacting an elected representative, or taking stronger actions such as joining an opposition party or participating in protests or boycotts. In this area, responses are less consistent. If the government were to shut down adversarial newspapers, 44.8 percent say they would actively oppose this action, yet a similar proportion (44.5 percent) say they would do nothing. Similarly, if the government dismissed judges on political grounds, 41.7 percent promise to act, while 46.4 percent reply passively. Even more telling, if the government suspended the legislature and canceled elections, 45.6 percent say they would respond forcefully, yet an equal number would acquiesce (44.4 percent) or actually support the government (1.8 percent).

In other areas, however, the protection of personal liberties shows greater resolve. Most significantly, when asked how they would react “if the government told you which religion you had to follow,” 58 percent vow to protest, and another 19.4 percent affirm they would join an opposition party; less than ten percent said they would be indifferent. Thus, defense of religious freedoms evokes the strongest response among Nigerians, who are apparently more ready to protect their spiritual faiths than to rise to the defense of democracy.

Satisfaction with Democracy

Apart from measuring abstract commitments to democratic values, it is also important to gauge citizens' contentment with the workings of the democratic system. In the months following the political transition, Nigerians express considerable satisfaction with “the way democracy works.” This popular vote of confidence is qualified with a strong note of caution, however, with many more Nigerians saying they are “somewhat satisfied” (58.1 percent) rather than “very satisfied” (25.5 percent).

The satisfied majority (83.6 percent) is an even higher proportion than those expressing a general preference for democratic government (80.9 percent). This balance of opinion is distinctive, as in many other new democracies around the world satisfaction with the workings of democracy is typically lower than overall preferences for a democratic regime (Rose et al, 1998; Bratton and Mattes, 1999).

When asked “How much of a democracy is Nigeria today?” more than 96 percent find the country to be democratic. 45.6 percent view it as a democracy with “major problems,” while the rest perceive minor problems (33.4 percent) or a “full democracy” (17.2 percent). In line with other responses, a majority agree (86.7 percent) that “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.” Not surprisingly, in view of these opinions and the unsettling legacy of military rule, 92.5 percent of respondents affirm that the transition to democracy has been good for the country.

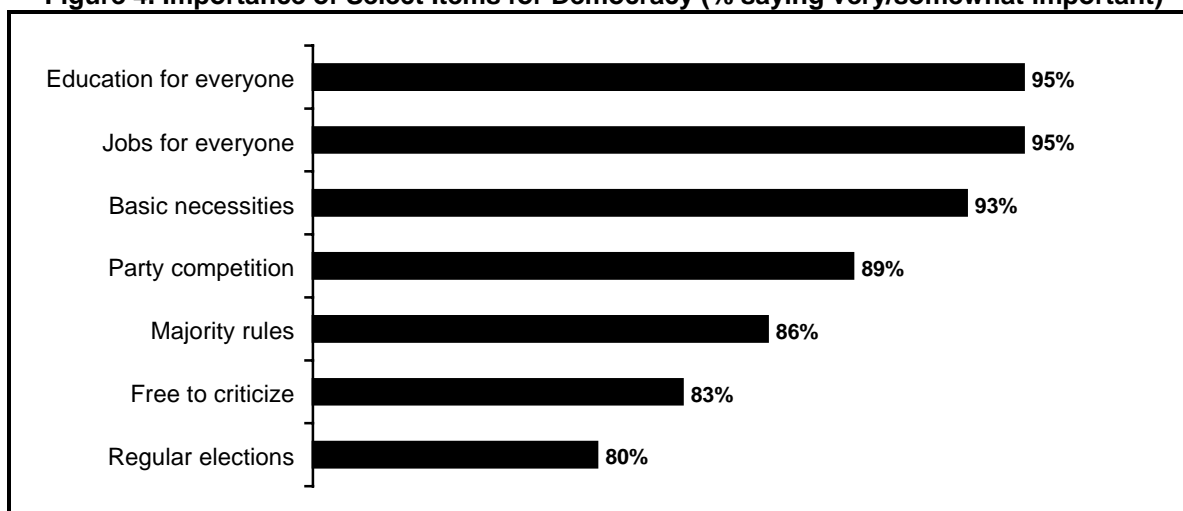
Performance of Democracy and the Government

Citizens use various criteria when evaluating government performance. The popularity of democratic regimes is often affected by economic performance or the delivery of material benefits, but there are also a range of “political goods,” i.e. basic liberties and the performance of institutions, that influence relative satisfaction with democracy (Przeworski et al, 1995; Diamond, 1999). The survey asked Nigerians to weigh the importance of various political and economic attributes that might be associated with a democratic regime. While essential political rights and benefits are clearly valued, respondents give equal (or somewhat higher) weight to economic outcomes.

The questionnaire asked “In order for a society to be called democratic, how important is each of these?” This allowed respondents to offer independent assessments of different factors, along a range of responses from “not at all important” to “very important.” There is a substantial valuation of basic democratic prerogatives and institutions, as 82.5 percent believe it is important to be able to criticize government, and 85.5 percent affirm the importance of majority rule (in each instance, slightly less than 50 percent rated them very important). In addition, respondents stress the importance of multi-party competition (89 percent, with 53.1 percent answering very important), and somewhat less strongly, regular elections (79.5 percent, 45.4 percent very important).

A range of economic benefits, however, elicit even stronger responses. Universal access to basic necessities like shelter, food, and water is considered important by 93.3 percent of those interviewed, including 70.1 percent who consider this very important. Indeed, the goals of full employment (94.5 percent important, and 73.3 percent very important) and universal education (94.9 percent important, and 74.1 percent very important) prompt the strongest opinions. Income equality is also valued highly, though not as highly as other economic goals: 81.9 percent deem it important, 57.1 percent highly important.

Figure 4. Importance of Select Items for Democracy (% saying very/somewhat important)



At face value, these responses suggest that Nigerians expect democratic governance to provide both economic and political goods and that, at least in the near term, they are especially concerned

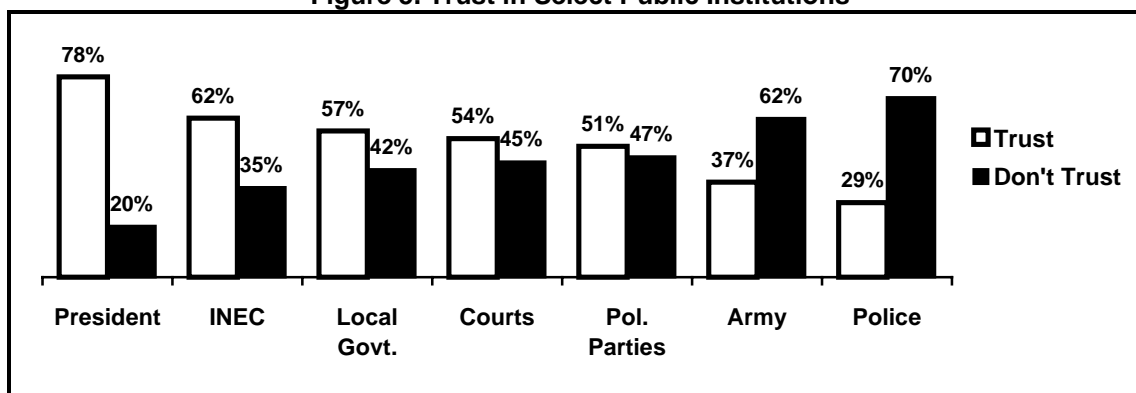
with basic amenities and social services. The problem of income inequality is also an important consideration in Nigerians' evaluation of democratic performance. Politically, there appears to be a somewhat greater concern with basic liberties and multiparty competition than with procedures such as elections.

One frame of reference for evaluating democratic performance is to compare current conditions with those under preceding military regimes. Nigerians perceive a marked difference between their present circumstances and those under former rulers. When asked whether conditions were relatively better, worse or the same under the current system, a large majority noted improvements in freedom of speech (88.9 percent), freedom of political affiliation (85.4 percent), and open electoral choice (86.4 percent). Substantial though lesser majorities believe that citizens now have greater influence on the government (65.9 percent), that the current government treats citizens more fairly and equitably (65.1 percent), and that people have more adequate living standards than under authoritarian rule (59.3 percent). In general, Nigerians are encouraged by improvements in political and economic conditions under the new democratic government.

The performance of key democratic institutions is obviously a touchstone for assessing the new regime. The founding elections of 1998-99 attracted criticism from domestic and international observers, yet Nigerians generally seem content with the integrity of the polls. When asked about the conduct of elections (given a spectrum of choices ranging from "very dishonestly" to "very honestly"), a majority of respondents nationwide believe in the relative honesty of the presidential poll (76.4 percent) and the state elections (76.9 percent). Another question asked about relative trust in public institutions (again, ranging from no trust to "a lot" of trust), and 61.8 percent of those interviewed express some degree of trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It would seem, then, that the new democratic government does not suffer a general deficit in legitimacy arising from the founding elections, notwithstanding the serious flaws in those polls.

Other democratic institutions also garner significant approval. A majority of Nigerians (63.8 percent) show some satisfaction with the performance of political parties, though citizens are clearly ambivalent about these new associations, with 50.8 percent expressing relative trust for parties and 47.3 percent relative distrust. Nigerians show a greater degree of trust for the National Assembly (57.5 percent) and the Local Governments (57.1 percent). They are not acutely concerned about partisan contention, as most disagree (70.3 percent) with the proposition, "Democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling."

Figure 5. Trust in Select Public Institutions



Of course, it is important to distinguish between the democratic system and the current government. While citizens may be favorably disposed toward democracy as a regime, they can hold different views toward elected officials or the majority party. Early in its term of office, the new Nigerian government attracts substantial levels of popular approval, generally equivalent to public favor for democracy.² When asked for an overall assessment of the government's performance, nearly 82 percent of respondents state "good" or "very good"; only 11 percent are neutral, and a little more than 5 percent offer negative ratings. This response is affirmed by separate ratings of elected officials. Nigerians generally express satisfaction with their National Assembly representative (58.1 percent) and their state representative (57.8 percent), and even higher ratings for governors (71.8 percent) and Local Government chairs (66.9 percent). These responses suggest that perceptions of performance are affected by proximity: the more distant representatives in Abuja earn less approval than local officials or the visible and influential state executive. This may also reflect the highly publicized scandals and controversies in the National Assembly in recent months. In an important exception to this pattern, the presidency appears to instill a high level of public confidence. Four out of five Nigerians express relative trust for President Obasanjo, with nearly a third affirming they trust him "a lot."

Patience with Democracy

Expectations about the future, and patience with the political process, influence the consolidation of democracy. The hopes that accompany a major change in government can be construed as an asset or a hazard. Optimism among the public can be an important advantage for government, providing a "cushion" of legitimacy for leaders in difficult times. Yet high expectations may also give way to disillusionment, raising the possibility that discouraged citizens could be more inclined to consider alternatives to a democratic system.

Nigerians clearly have high expectations of democratic government, and considerable optimism about their future. When asked about their own life's prospects, 86.6 percent anticipate being more satisfied in a year, with 58.9 percent expecting to be "much more satisfied." Regarding official performance, 70.8 percent expect the government to fulfill its promises within four years, i.e. a single term of office.

Nigerians currently feel a sense of efficacy in politics, as 80.9 percent agree (59.1 percent strongly) that "We can use our power as voters to choose leaders who will help us improve our lives," while only 16.2 percent are inclined toward a contrary view, "No matter who we vote for, things will not get

any better in the future.” Moreover, there is a sense of patience among citizens as 79.5 percent agree that “Our present system of elected government will be able to deal with inherited problems, even if this takes time.” Once again a small proportion (16.4 percent) accept the alternative proposition that “If democracy can’t produce results soon, we should try another form of government.” Nonetheless, there is some equivocation on the values of governance: although 49.8 percent of respondents believe that “The best form of government is a government elected by the people,” an equivalent proportion (48.8 percent) agree that “The best form of government is a government that gets things done.” While Nigerians display a preference for democratic values, they also expect a modicum of performance from their leaders.

Summary

The apparent intensity and consistency of Nigerians’ attitudes toward democracy, invite an explanation. Nigeria currently appears to be a paragon of democratic values, both in Africa and internationally. Moreover, the current government enjoys high legitimacy and favorable performance ratings, notwithstanding the many acute problems evident in Nigeria’s political and social landscape. Two distinct interpretations may help to account for these patterns. One possibility lies in the dimension of political culture. Observers of Nigerian politics have discerned an enduring, deep-seated commitment to democratic ideals, despite the country’s extended interludes of authoritarian rule (Peil, 1976; Diamond, 1995; Beckett and Alli, 1998). As Nigeria embarks on its newest democratic transition, these innate preferences are evident in public opinion.

Another explanation focuses on the nature of the current transition. Nigerians have reflected a degree of post-authoritarian trauma as the country emerged from an extended period of political crisis, autocracy, and economic decline under recent military regimes. The peaceful, timely change of government has opened the way to a transition euphoria, as freedoms are regained and a new sense of national possibility has emerged. In the current mood, many Nigerians have temporarily set aside their critical faculties regarding government performance, and their social or economic conditions.

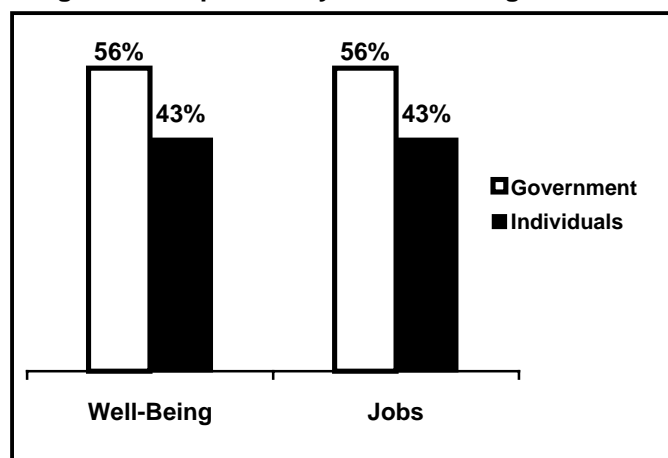
There is evidence in the survey data for both avenues of explanation. The depth and consistency of democratic attitudes and values cannot be dismissed as a transient outburst or an expression of “rote” ideas learned during the transition period. Nigerians evidently hold some enduring and fundamental attachments to democratic governance and they have a relatively sophisticated understanding of political institutions and processes. At the same time, the almost uniformly high evaluations of government performance and the lofty expectations of rapid progress in governance and the economy, bespeak a degree of acclamation that is not entirely realistic. It is very likely that the public will resume a more critical stance as the transitory enthusiasm wears off and many intractable problems persist. We would then expect to see assessments of performance (of both the democratic system and the incumbent government) decline markedly in subsequent surveys. If the presumption of an underlying democratic culture is correct, however, then declining *satisfaction* with democracy will not necessarily be mirrored by diminished *commitment* to democratic governance.

Attitudes Toward the Economy

Support for Market Values

General attitudes toward the market (or a “market regime”) frame a range of views toward economic policy and reform. In some respects Nigerians have a high regard for entrepreneurship and individual initiative, and they look toward the private sector for the provision of many essential goods and services. At the same time, there is a substantial preference for government involvement in crucial areas of the economy, as Nigerians expect the state to secure employment and welfare and to regulate certain markets.

Figure 6. Responsibility for Well-Being and Jobs



Nigerians are inclined toward a reliance on government for general economic welfare, as 55.5 percent accept that the government “should bear the main responsibility for ensuring the well-being of people,” while 43 percent stress personal autonomy, agreeing that “People should look after themselves and be responsible for their own success in life.” Similarly, many Nigerians express a penchant for government provision of jobs, as 56.1 percent lean toward the view that “The government should provide employment for everyone who wants to work,” while 42.8 percent agree that “The best way to create jobs is to encourage people to start their own businesses.”

There is, however, considerable regard for the benefits of individual initiative, as 55.1 percent agree that people “should be free to earn as much as they can, even if this leads to differences in income,” while another 39.2 percent take the alternative view that “The government should place limits on how much the rich can earn, even if this discourages some people from working hard.” With regard to entrepreneurship, 81.2 percent accept the notion of risk, agreeing that “If a person has a good idea for a business, they should invest their own savings or borrow money to try to make it succeed,” and only 16.7 percent allow that “There is no sense in trying to start a new business because many enterprises lose money.”

There is also evidence of significant trust in some market institutions. Surprisingly, in view of recent problems in the banking industry, 75.9 percent of respondents express relative trust for banks. Overall, 70.8 percent have some trust of businesses. A large majority of Nigerians (73.5 percent) are also tolerant of foreign investment, agreeing that “In order to create jobs, the government should encourage foreign companies to invest in our country.” Conversely, 24.6 percent are more skeptical, believing the government “should be wary of foreign investors because they may gain control of our national wealth.”

In order to gauge relative preferences for government and markets, the survey asked people to name the best provider for key goods and services: the government, private businesses,

individuals, or some combination of these? With regard to social services, most Nigerians expect government to be the main provider: 68.6 percent believe that government should be the main source of schools and clinics. In the area of employment, the responses affirm expectations toward the public sector, as 66.9 percent believe that government should be the main source of creating jobs. A majority of respondents also believe that government should be primarily responsible for producing oil (55.1 percent) and providing agricultural credit (60.9 percent).

In other aspects of the economy, however, there is greater emphasis on market mechanisms. Considering property rights, more than three-fourths of respondents believe that rural land should be freely owned and traded, while only 23.3 percent prefer communal land tenure under the control of traditional rulers. Markets for consumer goods are also an area where Nigerians accept greater private activity, as only 20.5 percent select government as the main provider, while a little more than 48 percent choose a variety of private sources.

Figure 7. Responsibility for Specific Goods & Services (in percent)

	Govt.	Business	Individuals	Govt. & Business	Govt. & Individuals	Business & Individuals	All 3
Protect Borders	91	1	1	2	1	-	4
Building Homes	11	3	66	2	15	1	3
Agricultural Credit	61	1	2	20	10	1	4
Oil Production	55	4	2	23	9	2	6
Selling Consumer Goods	21	4	30	8	13	14	10
Providing Schools/Clinics	69	1	1	9	11	1	9
Creating Jobs	67	1	1	12	7	1	12
Reducing Crime	67	1	1	2	13	-	17

When asked about specific policies that affect the balance of government and markets, there are diverse views. A majority of people accept open markets and free pricing for everyday items, agreeing (55.7 percent) that it is preferable "to have goods in the market, even if prices are high," while only a third prefer "low prices, even if there are shortages of goods." A substantial majority is willing to accept user fees for education, if linked to higher standards (68.6 percent endorsed this option), while 26.3 percent choose "free schooling for our children, even if the quality of education is low."

While Nigerians show some flexibility on price-related issues, they also hold strong preferences for government employment and ownership of enterprises. There is considerable opposition to retrenchment in the public sector, as 73.1 percent agree that "All civil servants should keep their jobs, even if paying salaries is costly to the country." Less than a fifth concur that "The government cannot afford so many public employees and should lay some of them off." Nigerians are also inclined against privatization, as 60.8 percent agree that the "government should retain ownership of its factories, businesses and farms," while 34.8 percent believe that "It is better for the

government to sell its businesses to private companies and individuals.”

Attitudes Toward Economic Reform and Performance

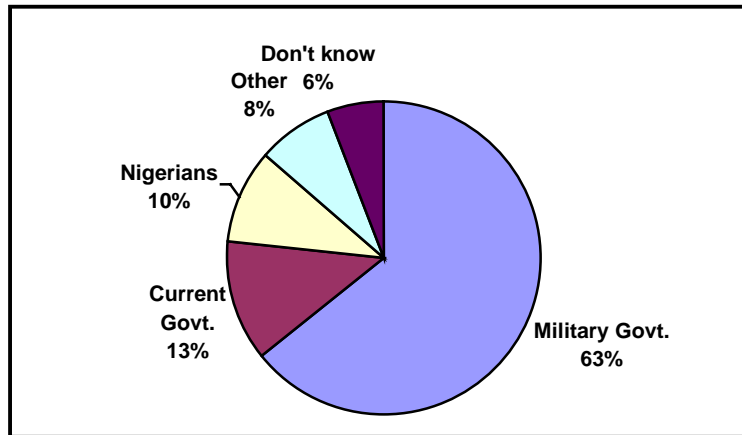
The policies discussed in the preceding section are important elements of the reform package introduced by the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986. Although the formal program has ended, the policies associated with the SAP have become a reference point for debates about economic reform in Nigeria.

Nigerians were asked about their familiarity with, and evaluation of the Structural Adjustment Program. Overall, there is limited knowledge about the program, as only 40.3 percent of respondents are familiar with the SAP by name. The survey probed the knowledge of the Structural Adjustment Program from among those who could identify the package. When asked to explain the purpose of the SAP, nearly half of that group reply it is to “improve the economy” (21.4 percent) or “improve living conditions” (24.9 percent). Others mention more specific economic goals, including stabilization and fiscal balance (7 percent), increasing jobs and/or productivity (3.2 percent), reforming economic institutions (7.6 percent), making goods available (5.9 percent), or reducing inflation (3.6 percent). Some answers have a general focus such as “self reliance” (7 percent), “hard work” (0.6 percent), or “bring the country together” (0.1 percent).

In light of the controversial nature of the SAP, it is interesting to note that fewer than 1 percent provide such negative definitions as “bringing hardship and difficulty,” “benefiting the rich,” or “corruption and looting.” Contrary to the conventional wisdom that “the people” view adjustment in a negative light, most knowledgeable Nigerians seem to associate structural adjustment policies with positive economic objectives.

Whether these objectives have been realized, of course, is another matter. When asked about their relative satisfaction with the SAP (based upon a range from “very unsatisfied,” through “neutral,” to “very satisfied”), two-thirds of respondents express some degree of dissatisfaction with the program, and only 14.1 percent display relative satisfaction. When asked more generally about reform policies, Nigerians are ambivalent; while 49.1 percent agree that “The costs of reforming the economy are too high; the government should therefore change its policies,” another 44.7 percent accept that “In order for the economy to get better in the future, it is necessary for us to accept some hardships now.”

There is a clear perception that public policies have failed to alleviate social inequalities, and have even aggravated imbalances. With regard to the reform program, 60 percent of respondents agree that government policies have “hurt most people and only benefited a few,” while slightly more than a third believe that these policies “have helped most people; only a few have suffered.” Who are the perceived beneficiaries? Among those who believe the benefits have been narrowly distributed, 84 percent identify “people close to the government.” Specific ethnic or regional groups are cited by few, and less than 1 percent mention elites such as politicians or the military.

Figure 8. Responsibility for Current Economic Conditions

When asked who is responsible for economic conditions in Nigeria, respondents focus chiefly on domestic factors: 67.6 percent cite the previous military government, and another 14.8 percent point to the current government. Nearly 10 percent respond that the Nigerian people themselves are mainly responsible. Fewer than 1 percent identify the IMF/World Bank, the SAP, or "international economic forces." Nigerians clearly locate accountability for the economy within their own

government and society.

The survey asked for evaluations of government performance on a range of economic issues. Generally, Nigerians show significant discontent with general economic conditions, as 55.1 percent are relatively dissatisfied with the current state of the nation's economy. Yet the present government earns generally favorable assessments, as a majority of respondents believe that newly elected leaders are doing well at handling jobs (54.6 percent), controlling inflation (58.3 percent), providing for education (61.4 percent) and health (63.7 percent), assuring food security (54.5 percent), and fighting crime (61.9 percent). Notably, the government is rated highest for its handling of corruption (64.2 percent). Thus, while most citizens remain discouraged by the state of the economy, they credit the current government for many of its efforts.

In the area of income inequality, however, the government receives more negative assessments, with only 39.5 percent of respondents feeling that leaders are doing well in narrowing the gap between rich and poor. This accords with other opinions regarding economic and social disparities.

Relationships Between Political and Economic Reform

Nigeria's democratic experiment is unfolding against the background of a weak economy and intermittent efforts at economic liberalization. The relationship between these political and economic processes is an important dimension of the nation's transition. Some observers see an integral link between economic performance and the consolidation of democracy. If citizens have high expectations of economic betterment under a democratic system, they may question the value of the new regime if benefits are not forthcoming quickly enough. Alternatively, it is possible that the public does not evaluate democracy purely along instrumental lines, but looks instead for a variety of political goods from the government (like order, freedom, justice and equality) alongside the satisfaction of more material needs (Bratton and Mattes, 1999; Diamond, 1999).

At a general level, there is an insignificant association between political and economic liberalism. For instance, people who believe more strongly in government provision of welfare show stronger

preferences for democracy than those who stress personal economic responsibility. At the same time, those who believe in sustaining the SAP display stronger democratic leanings than those who want to change economic policies. In short, economic and political values do not cluster in a regular fashion.

Evaluations of economic reform moderately influence assessments of the democratic regime. Among respondents who say they are very dissatisfied with the Structural Adjustment Program, slightly more than 80 percent still express relative satisfaction with democracy. By comparison, among those who are very satisfied with the SAP, nearly 92 percent register relative satisfaction with democracy. Thus, disappointment with adjustment would seem to attenuate enthusiasm for the political regime, though it does not undermine Nigerians' remarkably strong approval for democratic governance.

This same characterization holds true when we match preferences for democracy against general evaluations of the Nigerian economy. Among people who are most satisfied with the state of the economy, almost 84 percent express a preference for democracy over any other system, while 8.5 percent would consider a non-democratic alternative. Those least satisfied with the economy show slightly reduced democratic preferences (78 percent) and somewhat greater willingness to tolerate non-democratic options (11.4 percent). In the same vein, the respondents most satisfied with their personal economic circumstances strongly prefer democracy (78.6 percent), but those who are "not at all satisfied" with their conditions also display solid democratic commitment (75.7 percent). There is a strong and consistent attachment to democracy *regardless* of individual economic satisfaction.

Although economic factors do not currently appear to have a strong effect on attitudes toward democracy, popular perceptions of economic well-being could be consequential over time. Nigerians' relative patience about their economic and political conditions are especially relevant in trying to assess these relationships. One approach is to match appraisals of future well-being with attitudes toward democratic performance. The questionnaire asked people to speculate on their welfare, asking "How long do you think it will take before your own living standards meet your expectations?" The responses included the following range: within two years; within four years; within eight years; more than eight years; or, never. More than half of those interviewed expect to meet their expectations within two years, and a little more than three-fourths anticipate their ideal conditions within four years.

Among the most optimistic respondents a large majority (81.3 percent) tend to agree that democratic government can "deal with inherited problems, even if this takes time," while only 16.4 percent accept the view that if "democracy can't produce results soon, we should try another form of government." Among the more pessimistic segment, those who believe they will never meet their personal material goals, 73.3 percent concur that democratic government can eventually deal with problems, while 23.3 percent would look for alternatives if democracy doesn't deliver change. While there are significant differences among those who perceive different personal prospects, there is still a generally strong sense of forbearance toward the democratic regime. Also on this theme, the questionnaire asked for relative agreement or disagreement with the statement "In a democracy, the economic system runs badly." Overall, a majority of Nigerians (81.3 percent) disagree with the statement.

Thus, the Nigerian public is forming separate and largely unconnected perceptions of political and

economic reform. In a nutshell, Nigerians are much more committed to democracy than to economic adjustment and most attendant liberalization policies. This is clearly evidenced by the willingness of survey respondents to countenance change in political versus economic regimes. Whereas only 16.4 percent of survey respondents want “to try another form of government (soon),” nearly half think that the government should “change its economic policies (now).”

The Rule of Law

Establishing a rule of law is among the fundamental challenges for many new democracies, and the problem is manifest in Nigeria. Two aspects are especially salient: the prevalence of corruption and high levels of crime, especially in the major urban areas. The efforts by a democratic leadership to deal with these issues can significantly affect public perceptions of the government's legitimacy and effectiveness.

Official Corruption

The issue of corruption is a perennial concern among Nigerians. When asked how often they believe their fellow citizens offer bribes to public officials, 94.0 percent of those interviewed perceive some corruption, including 52.8 percent who reply that people "always" bribe officials. Almost three-fourths of respondents disagree with the statement that "Bribery is not common among public officials in Nigeria."

All told, those who admit being solicited for bribes name more than fifty different agencies or departments as the source. There is substantial concentration among this list however, as more than half name the police or law enforcement agencies as the main source, while a substantial group cite NEPA (11.7 percent) or local government authorities (12.4 percent). Interestingly, about 10 percent of bribes were paid to various educational institutions or instructors, yet relatively few people reported illicit payments to the courts (0.9 percent) or political institutions such as the INEC (0.1 percent).

The salience of corruption in the public eye obviously carries substantial weight in citizens' evaluations of their government. Nigerians are divided in their opinions of public officials, as about half (49.9 percent) are inclined to agree with the proposition "Politicians and civil servants are trying their best to look after the interests of people like me," while another 46.5 percent register some disagreement with that statement. This suggests that, despite the prevalence of bribery, Nigerians do not see their elected leaders and bureaucrats as totally self-aggrandizing.

Nigerians perceive a significant improvement under the new regime, as fully 82.6 percent agree (51.7 percent strongly) that "Corruption was a worse problem under the old military government than these days." The public evidently credits the present leadership for its anti-corruption efforts, as three-fourths (76.1 percent) agree that "Rather than protecting his friends, the President will fight corruption wherever he finds it."

Corruption is closely related to issues of equity, as it can foster special preferences that unduly favor some groups and disadvantage others. Nigerians are generally ambivalent on the issue of government favoritism. An impressive majority (77.0 percent) believe that "the government represents the interests of all Nigerians," rather than favoring just a few groups (14.9 percent) or a single group (3.8 percent).

Law and Order

Crime is another problem that affects government legitimacy as well as the everyday quality of life. A little over 60 percent of respondents report that they do not know anyone who has been the victim

of an attack or robbery within the past two years, and a virtually equal proportion have had no brush with burglaries. About 6 percent report being victims of violent crime personally, and about 7 percent have had their own homes robbed. Around 40 percent say they know someone else who had been a crime victim within the past two years. Most Nigerians sense improvements in recent years, as 58.3 percent say they feel safer today than they did five years ago.

Figure 9. Aware of Someone Who Has Experienced Crime?

	Attacked/Robbed in Public	Home Broken Into?
No one	60%	61%
Friend	26%	24%
Family	13%	13%
Self	6%	7%

The strategies that Nigerians use to respond to crime says much about their relative confidence in state institutions as well as the quality of social capital. The survey asked people what they would do if they felt unsafe in their surroundings. Nearly half say they would never report a crime to the police, a response that is echoed by citizens' relative distrust of law enforcement: 51.7 percent express no trust "at all" for the police, and another 18.4 percent profess some distrust. By comparison, courts of law evoke greater trust, as 53.0 percent express a degree of trust, while only 44.8 percent are inclined to distrust these institutions.

In order to estimate public perceptions of legality, we asked Nigerians how often they think their fellow citizens break various laws. Generally speaking, Nigerians see themselves as a fairly unruly society. A large majority (82.7 percent) say that other Nigerians throw rubbish in public places, either "always" or "most of the time." Smaller, though substantial majorities consider that their fellow citizens usually ignore traffic signs (72.8 percent), engage in petty trading without a license (72 percent), and evade income taxes (67.2 percent).

Although many new democracies around the world have experienced dramatic increases in crime (e.g. South Africa, Russia, and Indonesia), Nigerians do not believe that their democratic system is handicapped in responding to this problem. In spite of their concerns about personal security, 71.6 percent of those interviewed disagree with the proposition that "Democracies aren't good at maintaining order." A significant majority (61.9 percent) favorably assess the current government's performance in reducing crime.

To summarize: Nigerians and others have often commented on weaknesses in the rule of law in the country. Endemic corruption, weak law enforcement agencies, and a beleaguered judiciary have all created an environment in which the operations of laws and institutions are irregular and often arbitrary. The legacy of "rule by decree" under a succession of military regimes has also eroded the development of an effective legal and institutional culture. While there is no expectation that these problems will be remedied overnight, the advent of democracy has raised expectations. Nigerians perceive corruption, crime, and low compliance with the law in their society, yet they also note some significant improvements under the new regime. There is also broad approval of current policy efforts and judicial institutions.

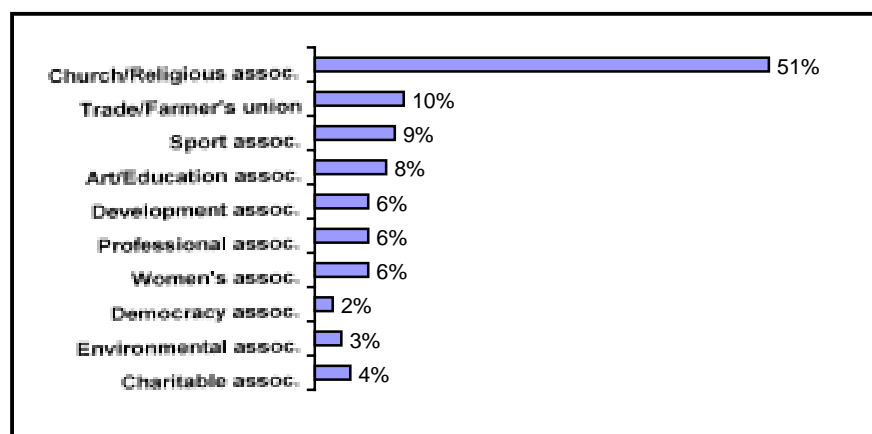
Civil Society and Social Capital

Another set of factors crucial to the development of democracy are the relative strength of civil society – the broad realm of private associations – and the quality of social capital, i.e. interpersonal trust and the density of participation in associational life. Where citizens are engaged in organizations devoted to their interests and concerns, such activity can play important roles in promoting political competence, improving the representation of interests, and placing limits on the arbitrary use of power by rulers. More recent studies have pointed to the character of social capital as an important element in political participation, institutional performance, and government accountability (Putnam, 1993). Nigeria has historically reflected a lively realm of associations, yet the adversities of political repression, a distressed economy, and communal tensions have limited the scope and reach of many civic groups.

Civic Engagement

Generally speaking, associational membership appears to be high in Nigeria, as 86.2 percent of respondents report that they are members in some type of association, including 23.6 percent who claim leadership positions in these organizations. By far the most prevalent form of membership is in religious organizations: nearly four out of five Nigerians belong to religious associations, including 50.7 percent who say they are “active” members and another 27.8 percent who profess “inactive” membership. No other type of organization comes close to this level of participation. Smaller proportions of the citizenry report active membership in trade unions or farmers' groups (9.6 percent), as well as associations devoted to sports (8.8 percent), art or education (8.0 percent), development (6.0 percent), professional and business concerns (5.8 percent), women's issues (5.8 percent), charitable work (3.9 percent), the environment (3.2 percent), or democratic advocacy (2.4 percent).

Figure 10. Associational Membership (active members)



The most “politicized” organizations in the Nigerian setting (focusing on democracy and the environment) embody small though significant participation. Although they claim a limited proportion of membership, this should be viewed in perspective. If 2.4 percent of Nigeria's adult population are active in pro-democracy organizations, this amounts to well over a

million people, an impressive groundwork of democratic commitments.

In other respects Nigerians appear to be active in civic affairs, as 45.2 percent report they have attended a community meeting within the past five years, and 54.1 percent have gotten together with others to raise an issue of concern. Only 7.2 percent have attended a demonstration, however,

indicating that more forceful activism is pursued by a minority.

Social Capital

Equally revealing measures of civic organization and social capital can be inferred from the subsistence strategies of Nigerians. When formal channels are insufficient to provide for necessities, people must search for alternative options: they may look to family members or other social contacts, seek help from their local community or civic organizations, petition government officials, or use market outlets. The relative use and availability of these different channels are important indicators of the extent of social capital, the quality of associational relationships, and the capacity of the market to compensate for inadequate public goods.

When asked whom they turn to for help in providing basic necessities, Nigerians reveal diversified strategies. For a significant proportion of the population, there is no recourse when they face shortages. For instance, 22.0 percent of those with difficulty obtaining food say they turn to “no one” for help. For those having trouble with access to schooling, 26.9 percent have nowhere to turn, and 17.0 percent of those in need of health care do not have alternative strategies. They simply do without. Securing water is evidently less difficult, as only 7.8 report no options.

For those who do have alternatives, people commonly turn to kin for assistance, or they directly secure market sources. In making up food deficits, Nigerians turn almost equally to relatives (35.3 percent) and the market (34.7 percent), as is the case with schooling (29.7 percent private, 29 percent kin). For healthcare, private provision (33.6 percent) is slightly more common than help from extended family (26.5 percent). With regard to all these needs, there is a relatively low recourse to government (ranging from 1.3 percent for food to 13.7 percent for health), and even less reliance on community groups, as fewer than 10 percent turn to their communities for these goods. A very different pattern is evident in the case of water supply. When facing water shortages, 53.1 percent of respondents say they turn to the market, and another 20.9 percent look to community groups – a higher reliance on the community than for any other basic need.

In Nigerian society, where the influence of the extended family is far-reaching, we would expect to find considerable recourse to kin in securing basic necessities. Alongside this line of defense, however, many people rely on market solutions to compensate for important goods and services. In at least one area – water supply – there is substantial evidence of civic organization to compensate for a lack of public provision.

The dimension of social trust is another important aspect of civic life. Nigerians express varying levels of trust with regard to specific people, groups and institutions. Interpersonal trust is highest among kin, as 85 percent of respondents trust their relatives, including 44.2 percent who feel “a lot” of trust. Trust declines with social distance, as 73.6 percent express relative trust for neighbors, and slightly less than two-thirds have some trust for other members of their own ethnic group. Overall, a scant majority (51.3 percent) professes relative trust for other ethnic groups, and only 11 percent are highly trustful.

In summary, a great majority of Nigerians belong to some form of association, though they are much more likely to hold religious affiliations than any other type of membership. Nearly a quarter of adults also hold some leadership position in their organization, reflecting a relatively high level of

“activism” among the population. Civic associations provide limited assistance in meeting the basic needs of most Nigerians, although in some areas (e.g. water supply) community organizations are important providers. While most Nigerians show a degree of caution toward strangers, they evince higher levels of trust toward family, neighbors, and members of their ethnic group. These findings suggest a substantial foundation of civic life as Nigeria pursues the development of democracy.

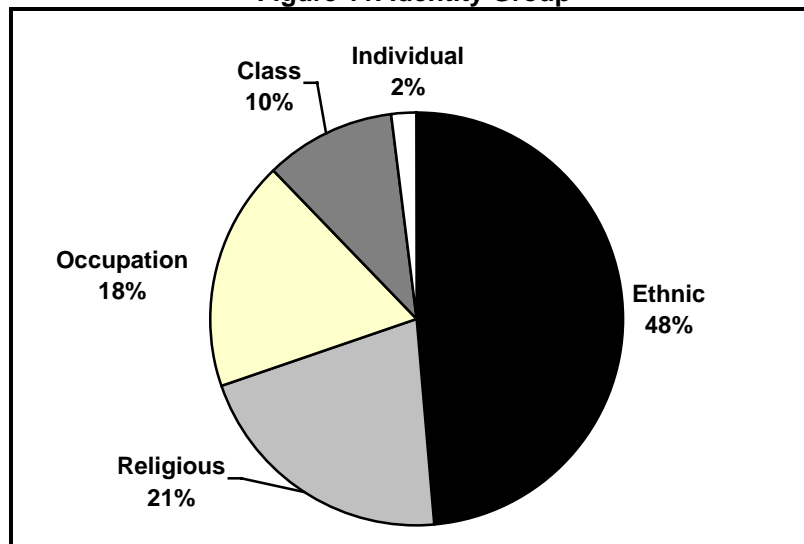
The Social Distribution of Attributes

So far, this report has discussed the attitudes of survey respondents as if Nigeria formed an homogenous whole. Yet Nigeria is one of the most complex societies in Africa, and it would be surprising if these myriad differences were not manifest in distinctive attitudes to democracy and markets. The purpose of this concluding section is to explore the social distribution of attitudes with a view, not only to displaying variations across sub-groups, but also to determine which social characteristics – gender, age, identity, education, region – seem to be the most important to the construction of civic culture.

Political and Economic Identities

How do Nigerians see themselves? We assume that public attitudes and practices derive in good part from citizens' self-ascribed identities. The survey asked respondents the following question: "Besides being a Nigerian, which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?" The distribution of responses is revealing: almost half of all Nigerians (48.2 percent) choose to tag themselves with an "ethnic" identity, compared to almost one-third (28.4 percent) who opt for "class" identities. The next most common category is a religious identity of some kind, chosen by 21.0 percent. The small group of remaining respondents (2.4 percent) identify themselves by individual attributes. At minimum, these figures confirm that group identities are important to Nigerians and that communalism has not been displaced by individualism. At face value, the figures also seem to suggest that Nigerians tend to cluster more readily around the cultural solidarities of kin than the class solidarities of the workplace.

Figure 11. Identity Group



Not surprisingly, members of cultural minorities are most likely to define their identities in ethnic terms. For example, 79.2 percent of Ijaw-speakers, and 71.6 percent of Tiv- and Igbo-speakers see themselves primarily as representatives of cultural sub-communities. Among the two largest ethnic groupings, Yorubas are considerably more prone to define themselves ethnically (45.5

percent) than are Hausa-Fulanis (29.9 percent), who rather opt for a religious identity (i.e. Muslim). On this point, Muslims are much more likely to evince a religious identity than are Christians. Whereas 35.5 percent of Muslims depict themselves as part of a community of faith, fewer than one in ten Catholics, Protestants and African Independent church members do so. Class identity is a function of education (but not income). For example, persons with post-graduate education are most likely to identify themselves in class terms, often as professionals or “middle-class.”

Evidently, these group identities are strongly felt. Overwhelming proportions of Nigerians agree that they “feel proud” to belong to their group (96.8 percent) and assert that they would “want their children to think of themselves” with the same identity (89.5 percent). They also believe that their group is the “best” (80.5 percent) and that their group ties are “stronger than to other Nigerians” (88.4 percent). Yet, while the potential for group chauvinism is high, it is offset by an equally strong commitment to national identity. Fully 97.2 percent of respondents agree that they are “proud to call themselves Nigerian,” and they feel just as strongly about this national identity as about their sub-national, group identity. Nigerians apparently feel no contradiction between group and national identities; they profess firm commitments to both.

But, are some group identities more intensely held than others? The results suggest that religious and ethnic identities are more fully formed and more strongly felt than class identities. Take just one example. Whereas those who identify with religious and ethnic communities are almost universally “proud” of their group identities (a stunning 99.5 and 99.0 percent respectively), those who see themselves as members of a social class are somewhat more equivocal about their pride (80.5 percent).

Does group identity lead to feelings of discrimination? Much depends on the way the question is asked. Overall, relatively few Nigerians (11.7 percent) feel that the economic conditions of their group are “worse than the economic conditions of other groups in the country.” Almost twice as many respondents are willing to agree that their group is “always (or) to a large extent...treated unfairly by the government” (20.3 percent).

One might therefore expect that Nigerians who regard their own identity in class terms would feel particularly aggrieved. The data bear this hypothesis out. Those who identify with a religion are least likely to feel “worse off” than others (4.9 percent); “ethnics” are twice as likely to feel so deprived (10.3 percent); and those who feel conscious of their social class are most likely to feel a sense of relative deprivation vis a vis other groups in Nigerian society (20.5 percent). The same pattern holds, but even more strongly, with regard to perceptions of government responsiveness. Ethnic followers are more likely than religious followers to think that the government treats their group unfairly (17.4 percent versus 10.7 percent). And those with class identities are twice as likely (36.0 percent) to perceive unequal treatment as are adherents of ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, since ethnicity is evidently the most conspicuous group identity in Nigeria, it is worth exploring whether some ethnic groups harbor a deeper sense of grievance than others. In this regard, the survey results reflect the resentment felt by certain minority groups in the Niger Delta. For example, Ijaw-speakers are almost twice as likely as Hausa-speakers to feel that their group is treated unfairly by government (32.0 percent versus 17.9 percent) and almost three times as likely to consider their group to be worse off than other groups in Nigeria (28.3 percent versus 10.3 percent).

We conclude that strong group identities, while endowing Nigeria with volatile politics, are not in and of themselves inimical to political or economic reform. We find no evidence that strong constituencies – either for or against reform – have formed along religious, ethnic, or even class lines.

Demography and Attitudes

Perhaps demographic factors can better predict the attitudes of Nigerians towards democracy and markets. We examine below the effects of gender, urbanization and religion.

The survey reveals that women in Nigeria feel less informed about political life than men, being twice as likely to say that they “don’t know” what democracy means (8.8 percent versus 3.6 percent). Their preferences for different types of political regimes are also less fully composed, with women being somewhat more likely to say that “to people like me, it doesn’t matter what form of government we have” (11.8 versus 7.4 percent). Hence Nigerian women are a bit less supportive of democracy than men, and less strongly opposed to “get(ting) rid of elections so that a strong leader can decide everything.” Overall, however, gender differences are slight and they occur in the context of widespread popular support for democracy.

The gender gap is widest when it comes to political participation. Men are more likely to say that they are registered as voters, that they voted in the 1999 presidential election, and that they have made personal contact with elected local government leaders. Men in Nigeria are also more likely than women to say that they have attended community meetings (54.7 percent versus 35.8 percent).

Political and economic attitudes also seem to depend on where Nigerians live. Rural dwellers are less likely than their urban counterparts to have heard about democracy, to be able to offer a definition of it, and to have an opinion about whether Nigeria is democratic. And, while rural and urban dwellers are equally supportive of democracy as a preferred form of governance, Nigerians who live in the towns are more dissatisfied with the way democracy actually works in practice (19.3 percent versus 10.6 percent). This tendency is graphically illustrated when Lagos State, which is 94 percent urban, is compared with the rest of the country. Here, as on several other issues, opinions in Lagos are distinguished from those in other parts of the country. Although 70.3 percent of Lagos respondents show some degree of satisfaction with democracy, 29.2 percent are dissatisfied, higher than in any other state or city. This suggests that, if disillusionment with democracy sets in, it will start, like previous political trends in the country, in Nigeria’s main urban center.

On the economy, urbanites are markedly better informed than rural dwellers, being twice as likely to have heard about the SAP (56.6 percent versus 28.1 percent). Urban dwellers are also more willing to pay fees for improvements in services like education, whereas rural dwellers are more willing to accept low educational standards, as long as schooling is free. The SAP was supposed to adjust agricultural prices and the urban-rural terms of trade in favor of agriculturalists, thus benefiting rural areas. Yet rural dwellers do not display greater satisfaction with structural adjustment than urban dwellers. If anything, the city folk are somewhat more likely to support economic reforms than their country cousins.

Religion also appears to have strong effects on mass attitudes. For example, Muslims are more likely than Christians to entertain the possibility of alternatives to democracy: 21.6 percent of Muslims agree that “if democracy can't produce results soon, we should try another form of government” (versus 12.0 percent for Christians). Islamic groups seem comparatively willing to countenance rule by a personal strongman. While a majority of Christians (61.7 percent) reject the strongman option, a minority of Muslims (39.0 percent) do so. As discussed below, however, these religious divisions may vary further by region.

The question arises as to which of these – or other – demographic factors offers the most compelling explanation of attitudes toward democracy and markets. It is difficult at first glance to see which factor most determines an individual's orientations. In the next section, we argue that the most influential factors in attitude formation in Nigeria are *region* (defined either as seven official geopolitical zones or a simple North-South distinction), and to a lesser degree *education*. In a multi-variate analysis, these two factors tend to override and displace the other factors just considered.

Variations in Attitudes Toward the Economy

We naturally expect that education levels would influence citizens' views toward markets and economic reform, since education is a strong predictor of income, class position, and understanding of economic affairs. There is even stronger evidence that Nigerians from different regions hold varying perspectives on economic affairs. Since regional differences cluster with education, it is important to consider both as sources of economic attitudes. For purposes of analytical clarity, in this section we have grouped the regions further into North and South.

Not surprisingly, education determines knowledge about the economy. Only 7.4 percent of Nigerians with no formal schooling can identify the Structural Adjustment Program, compared with more than a quarter of those who have completed primary school, and nearly two-thirds of those with a secondary certificate. Nine out of ten people with post-secondary education can identify the reform program.

Opinions about entrepreneurship and equality are mainly shaped by region. A little more than 60 percent of southerners agree that people should be able to earn whatever they can (even if this spurs inequality), while less than half of those in the north endorse this view. Conversely, 46 percent of northern respondents approve of government limits on income, compared with fewer than a third of those in the south.

A regional divide is evident on a number of other important economic questions, although the differences vary across issues. For instance, 60 percent of respondents in the northern states believe that the government should be primarily responsible for producing oil, while less than half of those in the south support this. Southerners are more likely than those in the north to accept partnerships between the government and the private sector. With regard to foreign investment, northern Nigerians are far more apprehensive than their southern countrymen. Four out of five southern respondents would welcome government promotion of foreign investment, while more than a third of those in the north believe the government should be wary of outside control of the economy. Views on rural land tenure also differ substantially, as nearly a third of northerners support communal ownership under the control of traditional rulers, while 85 percent of southerners advocate free markets for land.

These responses would seem to point to a stronger embrace of market forces in the southern areas of the country, and a preference for state tutelage in the north. Such views are not sweeping, however, as opinions on public employment make clear. A little over a quarter of those interviewed in the north believe that some government retrenchment is in order; this is double the proportion found among southerners, the majority of whom (77.1 percent) support maintaining the public payroll.

Regional perspectives on the Structural Adjustment Program show virtually no variation: in each section of the country, about two-thirds of respondents are relatively dissatisfied with the SAP, and about 14 percent express relative satisfaction. Northerners lean somewhat toward the view that the government should change its economic policies, while southerners are slightly more inclined to accept current hardship in hopes of future improvements. It would seem, then, that there is considerable national uniformity in opinions toward the SAP and the direction of government policies.

While education clearly drives some economic attitudes, there is considerable variation among sections of the country on a variety of economic concerns. By and large, these regional differences conform to historical disparities in economic structure and development. Attitudes thus closely follow regional interests with regard to economic affairs.

Regional Variations in Political Attitudes

This is even truer when it comes to politics. Nigeria's broad regional diversity has been explored by many observers of the country's politics (Joseph, 1987; Diamond, 1995; Osaghae, 1999). It is possible to separate out attitudes by geopolitical region and to observe meaningful comparisons and contrasts. In recent years it has become increasingly common in Nigerian political discourse to classify the 36 states into six separate "zones" (which we call regions), capturing major ethnic and linguistic groupings. We have adopted this classification, with the modification that Lagos is included as a separate region in view of its size and its unique position in national political and economic affairs.³

The analysis reveals strong and significant variation among the seven regions on a range of political attitudes. By and large, the broadest differences are found among Lagos and the Northwest region - confirming a widespread perception that Lagos and Kano define a central distinction in the nation's politics. On some issues, however, other regions represent the boundaries of opinion. It should also be noted that Lagos is commonly an anomaly in the opinions of the south and that the neighboring South Western states do not move in lock-step with opinions in the premier city. This suggests caution in drawing assumptions about "southern" attitudes from a reading of opinions in Lagos.

There is a clear regional divergence in civic participation. More than 90 percent of South Westerners claim membership in civic groups including churches, more than half belong to non-religious associations, and nearly a third hold some civic leadership position. Together these figures reflect the highest level of civic activism in the country. The North West, by contrast, displays the lowest levels of association membership (74.6 percent) while only 13.6 percent identify themselves as civic leaders. Indeed the "far northern" zones (North East and North West), with non-religious associational membership below 41 percent and leadership levels below 20 percent, show

a degree of civic activism that is about 10 percentage points below the southern regions or the Middle Belt (North Central).

Yet, surprisingly, civic engagement fails to predict an individual's interest in political affairs. When asked "How interested are you in politics and government," a little over 70 percent of respondents in the North West express interest, with 35 percent saying they are very interested. This is the highest level of political interest expressed in any region. Here again, the main contrast is with Lagos, where 46.4 percent assert they are "not interested" in political affairs, and only 20.3 percent are very interested. On this dimension of engagement, Lagos is the lowest of the regions.

This response is generally affirmed by answers to the question, "How often do you discuss politics and government with others?" Here again, Lagos appears to be the least active area, with 40.6 percent responding "never." Yet Lagos also reflects the highest proportion of people who discuss politics "often" (19.4 percent). Political discussion is generally most prevalent in the South-South region, where nearly three-fourths of respondents say they engage in some exchanges over politics. But it is followed closely by the North East (69.6 percent) and the North West (67.2 percent).

How can these apparent discrepancies be explained? We suggest that this reflects significant levels of political disaffection, especially in Lagos and the South West. In Lagos, however, apathy and cynicism are accompanied by a high concentration of political activism and engagement in public affairs, reflected in the prevalence of frequent political discussion. In the South-South, despite widespread feelings of political marginality, there is considerable political mobilization, and in the northern areas citizens perceive a greater stake in political institutions and processes.

This interpretation is confirmed by other measures of political efficacy. The survey asked respondents to choose between the statements "The way the government operates sometimes seems so complicated that I cannot really understand what is going on," or "I can usually understand the way the government works." Overall, Nigerians display some diffidence about government affairs, as more than two thirds express confusion, while 27.5 percent feel they have a grasp on these questions. There is an evident disparity in regional perceptions, as southerners profess the least competence in comprehending government, while those in the far north are the most confident of their understanding. More than two-thirds of the respondents in Lagos agree that the workings of government elude them, and in the South-South nearly four out of five tend toward this view. Marking the other end of the spectrum, slightly more than a third of those in the North East agree that they understand public affairs, and 31.1 percent in the North West do so. Not surprisingly, the regions that are the strongest centers of dissent feel comparatively alienated from central government.

When citizens are asked whether they have a voice in government, a similar disparity of opinion is evident. People in the northern regions are more likely to agree that "As a community, we are generally able to make our elected representatives listen to our problems," while those in the southern regions are inclined toward the view, "We are usually unable to make our elected representatives listen to us." Nearly 60 percent of Lagos respondents feel this way, and about half the respondents in the South-South concur. In the North East, by contrast, almost 57 percent believe they are heard by politicians, along with 48 percent in the North West. Once again, in those regions where there are strong perceptions of political exclusion, disaffection from government is

quite prevalent.

Sectional differences are also evident in the disposition toward authority. Nigerians generally tend to think that "We Nigerians should be more active in questioning the authority of our leaders" (69.7 percent register some agreement), while relatively fewer accept the proposition that "In Nigeria today, there is not enough respect for authority" (27.8 percent agree). The southern regions, however, are more strongly disposed toward a critical stance. The notion of questioning authority attracts strongest agreement in Lagos (78.9 percent), the South West (79.9 percent) and the South-South (75 percent). Respondents in the North West are more inclined toward regard for authority, as 38.4 percent concur that "there is not enough respect" while 59.1 percent believe that questioning authority is best. Thus, while Nigerians in all regions tend to believe in active citizenship, those in the south are more skeptical of authority and those in the north more deferential.

As we reported earlier, Nigerians strongly endorse freedom of expression and political tolerance. Nationwide, nearly three-fourths agree that "If people have different views than I do, they should be allowed to express them." The most emphatic agreement is found in Lagos, where more than nine out of ten people concur, 82 percent strongly. The most equivocal response derives from the North West, where 37.1 percent lean toward the view that "It is dangerous and confusing to allow the expression of too many different points of view." There is also relatively more concurrence with this view in the other northern regions (and in the South-South states, possibly reflecting the concerns of political violence in the area). Overall, while Nigerians accept freedom of speech, those in the north are more cautious about the hazards of open expression.

As for approval of the head of state's performance, we observe varying levels of trust for President Obasanjo. The president evokes the highest levels of confidence in the north, as 86.4 percent of those in the North West and 84.3 percent in the North East express relative trust. By contrast, the areas with the greatest degree of mistrust are Lagos (30.3) percent and the South-South (30.1 percent). In the South Western states around Lagos, President Obasanjo earns greater regard, as four out of five respondents say they trust him. While many citizens trust the President, there is a larger measure of suspicion in the contentious political atmosphere of Lagos and the restive communities of the Niger Delta.

Levels of satisfaction with democracy are also varied, though here it is southerners and Middle Belt groups who are most critical. While a substantial majority of citizens in all regions say they are satisfied with the workings of the current system, 28.2 percent of those in Lagos express relative dissatisfaction, as do 19.4 percent in the North Central states and 14.4 percent in the South-South. These are the highest rates of disapproval among the regions. In all regions except Lagos satisfaction levels are 80 percent or higher, yet the highest levels of "very satisfied" respondents are found in the North West (36.3 percent) and the North East (34.5 percent).

If southerners seem more inclined to take a critical stance toward the democratic regime, they are also more patient about the political process. When asked whether the present system "will be able to deal with inherited problems, even if this takes time," or "if democracy can't produce results soon, we should try another form of government," southerners endorse the first sentiment, in impressive numbers. Only 3.8 percent of those in the South West, and 10.5 percent in Lagos, would be willing to contemplate an alternative regime. The northern states also reveal considerable forbearance

with democracy, although a greater proportion would look for non-democratic alternatives, particularly in the North West (27.5 percent) and the North East (21.8 percent). It would seem that southerners are more optimistic about the ability of a democratic system to serve their basic interests over the long term.

Finally, support for democracy as a system of governance is the most important dimension of political attitudes considered here. There are significant variations among regions in the choices between the following standard statements: "Democracy is preferable to any other form of government," "In certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable," and "To people like me, it doesn't matter what form of government we have." People in the South West affirm the highest level of preference for democracy (89.2 percent), while those in the North West evince the greatest willingness to consider non-democratic alternatives (15.6 percent), and respondents in the South-South are least likely to consider this option (3.3 percent). The North Central (or Middle Belt) states reflect the greatest concentration of apathy, as 18.9 percent express indifference to their form of government (compared with only 2.3 percent in the South West). While southerners hold emphatic commitments to democracy as a system, those in the northern states, despite strong democratic inclinations, appear to be somewhat more ambivalent.

Conclusion

The survey reveals fervent attachments to democratic values in Nigeria, as well as remarkably high assessments of the performance of the new regime, strong evaluations of elected officials and political institutions, and a heady optimism about the benefits of democracy. These popular attitudes may seem irreconcilable with the more sober realities evident on the streets, in the media, and in public discourse. Nigeria confronts profound challenges in consolidating new institutions, crafting effective leadership, achieving social stability, and reconstructing the economy. As daunting as these problems are, however, many Nigerians find their present circumstances far less onerous than those under preceding authoritarian governments. Many observers of the recent transition have remarked on the public acceptance of a rapid and sometimes flawed process. An overriding national concern with ending military rule caused many Nigerians to abide the shortcomings of the transition period. We conclude that this is still the temper of the country. In the "miracle of the moment," expectations are likely to outshine judgment and citizens are less likely to be critical of the flaws in everyday governance. As the slow, difficult realities of political and economic change become more apparent, we might expect to see dramatic decreases in political satisfaction and confidence. The views of average citizens provide a foundation for the political life of democratic government, and to all those concerned with Nigeria's future, it will be important to keep listening to the popular voice.

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Endnotes

1. The contents of the questionnaire were modeled on a series of “Afrobarometer” surveys now underway or planned in at least twelve other African countries. The Afrobarometer is a joint enterprise of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, Ghana) and Michigan State University (MSU). The countries are: South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Benin, Ghana, Mali, Uganda and Tanzania. Information on the Afrobarometer and survey results for selected countries can be obtained from any of the above partner institutions.
2. Here, as elsewhere, we offer a general caveat that the timing of the survey may have an influence on responses. Fieldwork for the survey was concluded in early February 2000, prior to the eruption of religious violence in Kaduna, prominent legislative controversy over the budget, impeachment challenges, and other issues of major concern. While we do not believe these events would dramatically alter the survey results, such consequential problems could have an impact on public opinion over time, and we may see some of these changes in subsequent surveys.
3. The zones (regions) are defined as follows: Lagos; South West (Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Oyo); South East (Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, Anambra); South-South (Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom); North West (Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Jigawa); North East (Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Yobe, Taraba, Borno); North Central (Kogi, Kwara, Benue, Niger, Plateau, Abuja/FCT).