



FROM ADVISORY TO OVERSIGHT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGERIAN LEGISLATURE, 1914 TO 1999

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Abstract

The Nigerian legislature has undergone a profound transmogrification from the colonial constitutions of 1914, 1922, 1946, 1951 and 1954, to the First Republic Constitutions of 1960 and 1963, the Second Republic Constitution of 1979, to the Fourth Republic Constitution of 1999. The military interregnum of 1966 to 1979 and 1983 to 1999, which occasioned the 1989 and 1995 Constitutions that were not promulgated, also precipitated changes in the development of Nigeria's legislature. These mirrored the turbulent journey of the Country's legislature from colonial dependency to the faltering steps towards nationhood. From its origin as a colonial tool for administrative convenience through to its emergence as a cornerstone of democratic governance, the legislative arm has shifted between various models of representation, majorly from the fusion of powers under the parliamentary to the separation of powers under the presidential models. This article examines the historical transition of the Nigerian legislature from a subservient advisory body with no legislative autonomy to a robust, independent, co-equal arm of government vested with expansive oversight powers under the 1999 Constitution. Through the doctrinal analysis of successive constitutional frameworks, this paper identified the transformative identity of Nigeria's legislature from its passive collaboration with the executive to a vital mechanism for democratic accountability, national integration, and constitutional checks and balances.

Keywords: *Legislative Oversight, Constitutional History, Separation of Powers, Nigerian Parliament, Federalism.*

Introduction

Within the architecture of modern constitutional democracy, the legislature serves as the institutional bedrock of popular sovereignty and public accountability. The legislature plays a vital



role as a branch of government with functions in social regulation, conflict management, and national integration within a political order.¹ The legislature acts as a primary regulative institution, setting standards for social interactions and the pursuit of private interests through the law.² It manages conflict by providing a forum for divergent views, thereby preventing them from becoming destructive.³ It also facilitates national unity and supports the smooth running of the political system through authorization, legitimation and Representation.⁴ The trajectory of the Nigerian legislature offers a compelling case study in institutional metamorphosis, mirroring the nation's turbulent and complex journey toward self-determination and cohesive nationhood. Initially conceived during the colonial era as an instrument of administrative convenience for British imperial hegemony, early legislative-style bodies such as the 1914 Nigerian Council possessed no independent legislative or executive capacity, serving merely as symbolic advisory attachments to an omnipotent colonial executive. The Nigerian Legislature has evolved from its origins as a tool in the hands of our colonial masters for administrative convenience purposes to its materialization as a cornerstone of democratic governance. This evolution was not linear as it was characterised by periods of constitutional experimentation, regionalism, and lengthy intervals of military suspension.⁵ The most profound dimension of this evolution lies in the changing nature of legislative power itself. The institution has successfully transitioned from a subservient advisory council into a co-equal, independent branch of government armed with robust, constitutionally protected oversight capabilities. While parliamentary oversight in the early post-independence era was limited to simple floor session questioning, the modern National Assembly is empowered with extensive investigative tools, committee systems, and quasi-Judicial authority designed to hold executive agencies accountable. This article provides a legal and historical analysis of the institutional evolution of the Nigerian legislature, tracing its path from the seminal amalgamation of 1914 to the dawn of the Fourth Republic in 1999. By examining the structural, political, and constitutional dynamics that shaped this journey, this study illustrates how a mechanism originally designed for imperial control was progressively reclaimed and reshaped to become the heartbeat of Nigeria's contemporary democratic governance.

Literature Review

The story of African parliaments after colonial rule is a major piece of political history. To understand how Nigeria's legislature grew from a powerless colonial advisory board into an equal partner in democratic government, this review looks at three main areas: the theory of checks and balances, the history of colonial law-making bodies, and the lasting damage left by decades of military rule.

Checks, Balances, and Oversight

¹ G.O Arishe, 'Developing effective Legislature', Paclerd Press, Benin City, 2017 p22

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*, p23

⁴ *Ibid*, p27

⁵ Y. Abubakar and H. Ali (2019). *The Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary: Toward Democratic Governance in Nigeria Since 1914*. *Journal of Economic Info*, 6(1), 43–48 at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332105786_The_Executive_Legislature_and_the_Judiciary_Toward_Democratic_Governance_in_Nigeria_Since_1914 (Last visited on May 1st, 2026)



In a democracy, a parliament does more than just pass laws—it is the ultimate watchdog for public accountability. Legendary legal scholar B.O. Nwabueze emphasized that the real purpose of a legislature is to curb executive excesses and prevent absolute power from pooling in one place.

In Nigeria's current Fourth Republic, legislative oversight is supposed to keep the president and their cabinet within the bounds of the constitution, especially regarding how public money is spent. While classic political theory sees oversight as a tool for honesty and transparency, many modern African scholars point out that deep political divisions and corruption often turn oversight into a tool for political blackmail or self-enrichment.

The Colonial Roots of Nigeria's Parliament

The history of Nigeria's parliament mirrors the country's wider struggle for independence and unity. Historians point out that ever since Nigeria was unified in 1914, the government has grown unevenly, with the executive branch always holding a massive structural advantage over both legislature and the courts.

Early colonial bodies, starting with the 1914 Nigerian Council, had no real power and did not represent the people; they were simply tools for British rule. Even when later colonial constitutions (in 1922, 1946, and 1951) gradually allowed Nigerians to vote and represent their regions, these changes were made to solve British administrative headaches, not to build a strong local parliament.

When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, it adopted the British Westminster style of government, where executive and legislative powers are blended together. Political scientist Rotimi Suberu argues that this system couldn't handle the intense ethnic and regional rivalries of the era. Because the prime minister's majority party-controlled parliament, there was no independent committee system to keep the government in check, leaving the system highly vulnerable to the crises that eventually triggered the first military coup.

The Damage of Military Dictatorships

Historians completely agree on one thing: decades of military rule (1966–1979 and 1983–1999) devastated Nigeria's legislative traditions. While the civil service and the courts survived military dictatorships by adapting, the parliament was completely wiped out every time a coup occurred.

As the scholar Nwodo notes, whenever a military dictator suspended the constitution, they closed down parliament, which killed off decades of institutional memory. When democracy finally returned under the presidential systems of 1979 and 1999, the new lawmakers lacked the procedural knowledge, law-drafting skills, and confidence needed to face down a highly powerful presidency that had been built up by decades of military rule.

Because of this history, modern researchers view the current National Assembly's aggressive use of its watchdog powers under the 1999 Constitution as more than just routine politics. It is a historical fight to reclaim its rightful, equal status in Nigerian government.

Methodology

This study uses historical records and legal documents to examine how the Nigerian legislature grew between 1914 and 1999. Because this topic is based on history and the constitution, analyzing laws and political events provides a deeper understanding than using data or statistics.



This study looks at how Nigeria's law-making power changed over nine major time periods. It uses a framework called historical institutionalism, which is just a way to study how organizations and rules change over time. By looking at these nine eras, the study shows how Nigeria's legislature grew from a basic advisory group during colonial times into a powerful democratic body that watches over the government today.

The Colonial Era (1914–1960)

The 1914 amalgamation and the 1914 Constitution

Nigeria's first Constitution of 1914 was formed through various legal instruments, including the Colonial Laws Validity Act 1865 and the Foreign Jurisdictions Act 1890. Sir Frederick Lugard's address during the amalgamation of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria on January 1, 1914, was a key component of the constitution.⁶ The British colonial administration in Nigeria initially did not have a written constitution, despite the country's diverse and complex nature. The constitution established centralized administration, with the former Southern and Northern Protectorates becoming Groups of Provinces under Lieutenant Governors, and Lagos under an Administrator.⁷ An Executive Council and the Nigerian Council were established, with the latter intended to develop intelligence on public opinion but lacking legislative or executive powers. The Nigerian Council served as the first formal legislative style body for the unified territory.⁸ This council was largely symbolic. It consisted of 36 members, including 23 Europeans and 13 Nigerians, but it possessed no real legislative authority.⁹ Its primary function was advisory, and the Governor General retained absolute power to ignore its recommendations. The unwritten constitution's flexibility allowed Lugard to implement laws, measures, and directives with ease.

The Clifford Constitution (1922)

A significant turning point occurred with the Clifford Constitution of 1922, which abolished the 1914 Council and replaced it with a more structured Legislative Council. The first Legislative Council in Colonial Nigeria was introduced by the 1922 Clifford Constitution.¹⁰ Under this Constitution, the Legislative Council was expanded to 46 members. While the body remained dominated by an official and nominated majority, it crucially allowed for the direct election of four Nigerian members: three representing Lagos and one representing Calabar. This development, though modest in scope, catalysed the birth of modern Nigerian nationalism, giving rise to the nation's first political parties, such as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded by Herbert Macaulay, and stimulating a vibrant local press. Despite these landmark advancements, the Clifford Constitution suffered from severe structural and geopolitical limitations that undermined its capacity to foster a unified national legislature. The legislative jurisdiction of the new Legislative Council was strictly confined to the Southern Protectorate. It possessed no authority over the

⁶ U.E Okolocha and J.J Ndana, '*Legislative Powers in Colonial Nigeria: Precursor of A Lame Giant*' at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/395466420_Legislative_Powers_in_Colonial_Nigeria_Precursor_to_a_Lame_Giant (last visited on May 1st, 2026)

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ ALI et al, *supra* note 8

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ G.C Malasawe, '*Public Participation and Inclusivity in Nigeria's Legislative Process: A Historical Analysis*', Legislative Process and Drafting Course paper (LLM), Faculty of Law, University of Abuja(unpublished), p3



Northern Protectorate.¹¹ Legislative power for the Northern Territory remained firmly vested in the hands of the Governor General, who continued to govern the region single handedly through the issuance of proclamations.¹² By isolating the North from the central deliberative body, the constitution institutionalized a political divide, preventing the emergence of a cohesive, pan Nigerian legislative culture during a critical formative period. Consequently, while the Clifford Constitution of 1922 laid the foundational bedrock for democratic elections and legislative formalism in Nigeria, its structural flaws reinforced regional insularity, maintaining a system where true national legislative unity remained subservient to colonial administrative convenience.

The Richards and Macpherson Constitutions (1946-1951)

Sir Arthur Richards succeeded Sir Bernard Bourdillon as Governor in 1943. The 1946 Richard's Constitution, enacted as The Nigeria (Legislative Council) Order Council No 1370, which came into effect on January 1, 1947.¹³ The 1946 Richards Constitution created regional assemblies to handle Nigeria's diverse regions. However, regular citizens were left out because only traditional rulers and the educated elite were consulted.¹⁴ The regional structure attributed to Sir Richard originated from Sir Bernard Bourdillon's administration, with proposals for constitutional reforms leading to the division of Nigeria into Northern, Eastern, and Western Regions.¹⁵ The new constitution established an enlarged Legislative Council of 45 members, with the Governor's legislative powers requiring the advice and consent of the council for the governance of Nigeria. Despite the regional structure, Nigeria remained a unitary state, with Regional Legislatures having no powers and serving only an advisory role, as bills were debated but not amended by them.¹⁶

Sir John Macpherson promised constitutional changes starting in 1950, following the failure of a prior delegation to London. A select committee reviewed the Richard's Constitution and submitted a draft in 1949. The 1951 Macpherson Constitution was a major turning point for Nigeria because it was built on public input. Before it was written, officials held extensive meetings across the country, from small village meetings to district, provincial, and regional conferences.¹⁷ This led to the 1951 Constitution with a quasi-federal structure and regional Houses of Assembly. The 1951 Constitution devolved powers to regions, marking the start of Federalism, but conflicts arose when laws from different legislatures clashed.¹⁸ Regionalism faced criticism for promoting ethnic dominance and marginalization within regions, leading to agitation by minority tribes for their own regions, countering Nigerian nationalism.

1954 Lyttelton Constitution

If the Richards and Macpherson Constitutions were eras of constitutional experimentation, the Lyttelton Constitution of 1954 named after the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttelton served as the definitive legal blueprint that formalized Nigeria as a true Federation. Triggered by the

¹¹ ALI et al, *supra* note 8

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ U.E Okolocha and J.J Ndana , *supra* note 9

¹⁴ G.C Malasawe , *Supra* note 13, p4

¹⁵ U.E Okolocha and J.J Ndana , *Supra* note 9

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ G.C Malasawe , *Supra* note 13,

¹⁸ U.E Okolocha and J.J Ndana , *Supra* note 9



systemic collapse of the 1951 Macpherson Constitution due to severe inter regional political friction and riots, the Lyttelton Constitution was the product of extensive deliberations at the London and Lagos Constitutional Conferences of 1953 and 1954. It fundamentally reshaped the distribution of power, elevating the regions from mere administrative zones into powerful, semi-autonomous political units. The architectural hallmark of the Lyttelton Constitution was the formal judicial separation of legislative powers between the central government and the regional governments. This was achieved through the introduction of two distinct legislative schedules. The first was the Exclusive Legislative List which placed matters of national importance such as defence, foreign affairs, currency, and external trade solely within the legislative competence of the central Federal Legislature. The second was the Concurrent Legislative List which covered areas where both the federal and regional legislatures could validly enact laws on matters such as agriculture, industrial development, and higher education. Crucially, to prevent legislative chaos, a constitutional clause dictated that in the event of any inconsistency, federal law would override regional law to the extent of the conflict. All legislative matters not explicitly listed in either the Exclusive or Concurrent schedules were reserved exclusively for the Regional Houses of Assembly, vastly expanding regional autonomy. Beyond the division of powers, the Lyttelton Constitution introduced transformative institutional reforms to the composition of the legislature itself. For the first time, the central legislative body (the House of Representatives) became a directly elected assembly, completely unlinked from the regional Houses of Assembly that had previously acted as electoral colleges. Furthermore, the constitution established the autonomy of regional judiciaries and public services, and it paved the way for self-governance by establishing the post of Regional Premiers as regional executives. By institutionalizing a robust federal structure and creating a directly elected central legislature, the 1954 Lyttelton Constitution effectively dismantled the unitary vestiges of early colonial rule and laid the final legislative and constitutional groundwork for Nigeria as an independent nation in 1960.

The First Republic (1960–1966)

There were two Constitutions that came into existence during this period. The first Republic began with the **1960 Independence Constitution**. Three years later (1963) it was replaced with the Republican Constitution. The 1960 Independence Constitution officially ended British colonial rule, making Nigeria an independent and self-governing nation. However, even with this new freedom, Nigeria still maintained a formal link to the British. Although Nigeria was independent, the Queen of England still appointed a Governor General to act as her representative and the Federation's Commander in Chief. The power to create laws sat with a Parliament made up of three parts: the Queen, the Senate, and the House of Representatives.¹⁹ In other words, while Nigeria gained the right to rule itself in 1960, it remained a constitutional monarchy where the Queen was still the official Head of State. **The 1963 Constitution** officially removed the Queen of England as the ceremonial head of state, making Nigeria a republic while retaining the parliamentary model.²⁰ The Parliamentary System of government during the first Republic consisted of a bicameral legislature made of the Senate which consisted of appointed members based on regional

¹⁹ U.E Okolocha and J.J Ndana, Supra note 9

²⁰ Suberu, Rotimi T., 'Federalism and the First Republic of Nigeria, 1960–1966', in Toyin Falola, and Matthew M. Heaton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian History*, at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365188586_The_Oxford_Handbook_of_Nigerian_History



representation and the House of Representatives which consisted of members directly elected. The First Republic was built on a tripod of regions: the North, the West, and the East. The Mid West was later created in 1963. Each region operated its own parliamentary system with a Premier as the head of government and a Governor as the ceremonial head.²¹ Nigeria's First Republic was characterized by the British Parliamentary model. Under this arrangement, the roles of Head of State (the Governor-General, later President) and Head of Government (the Prime Minister) were distinct. In the First Republic, the Prime Minister was *primus inter pares* (first among equals).

Throughout the First Republic, both the federal government and the regions operated under the Westminster system, which was fundamentally anchored on a fusion of powers between the executive and legislative arms, rather than a strict separation.²² While the parliamentary system facilitated robust debate, its legislative oversight mechanisms were notably fragile compared to modern presidential models. Ministers answered questions during floor sessions, but the executive's dominance over its legislative majority often insulated the government from strict accountability. Ultimately, the deep ethnic polarization of the regional political parties, combined with acute legislative crises such as the census controversies, the Western Region political crisis, and allegations of systemic corruption eroded the legitimacy of the civilian administration.²³ This culminated in the violent military coup of January 15, 1966, which suspended the 1963 Constitution, dissolved the regional and federal legislatures, and plunged Nigeria into a prolonged era of military autocracy.

Military Rule (1966-1979) and its impact on the trajectory of the Nigerian Legislature

The attainment of Nigerian independence on October 1, 1960, was greeted with profound optimism. Operating under a Westminster style parliamentary system, the First Republic placed the legislature at the institutional center of governance, positioning it as the primary arena for national integration, policy debate, and democratic consolidation.²⁴ However, this democratic experiment was abruptly terminated on January 15, 1966, by Nigeria's first military coup d'état.

The Mechanics of Military Governance (1966–1979)

Upon taking power, the military regime moved swiftly to institutionalize its authority by dismantling the legal framework of the First Republic. The first major legislative act of the military was Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 1 of 1966.²⁵ This decree set the blueprint for military absolutism by executing several sweeping changes such as

- a. **Suspension of Parliament:** It dissolved the federal National Assembly (the Senate and the House of Representatives) as well as all regional legislative houses.
- b. **Fusion of Powers:** It concentrated both executive and legislative authority in the Supreme Military Council (SMC) headed by General Ironsi, later maintained under

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Suberu, Rotimi T, Supra note 23

²⁴ K. Ezra Constitutional Developments in Nigeria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p220

²⁵ Federal Republic of Nigeria, Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 1 of 1966, Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at <https://andyreiter.com/wp-content/uploads/militaryjustice/ng/Laws%20and%20Decrees/Nigeria%20-%201966%20-%20Decree%20No.%201.pdf> (last visited on 6th July 2026)



General Yakubu Gowon, General Murtala Muhammed, and General Olusegun Obasanjo.²⁶

- c. **Ouster Clauses:** To ensure unchecked authority, decrees regularly included ouster clauses that explicitly barred the judiciary from questioning the validity of military decrees, effectively destroying the traditional system of checks and balances.²⁷

For thirteen years, laws were not passed through parliamentary debate, committee stages, or public hearings. Instead, they were manufactured as Decrees at the federal level and Edicts at the state level, signed into law by the stroke of a military dictator's pen.

Impact on the Trajectory of the Nigerian Legislature

The institutional erasure of the legislature between 1966 and 1979 profoundly stunted and distorted its development. While the executive and judicial branches maintained a continuity of bureaucracy and personnel throughout the military era, the legislature had to be rebuilt from scratch in 1979. This prolonged disruption had several critical impacts.

- a. **The Interruption of Institutional Memory and Legislative Culture:** In a healthy democracy, legislative proficiency is an inherited art passed down through successive generations of lawmakers, clerks, and parliamentary drafters. The 1966 coup completely severed this chain of continuity. When the Second Republic was ushered in on October 1, 1979, Nigeria faced a severe deficit of experienced legislators. The nuanced arts of parliamentary debate, coalition building, committee oversight, and legislative drafting had been lost to a generation.²⁸ Consequently, the early years of the Second Republic National Assembly were marred by procedural inefficiencies, as lawmakers struggled to understand their constitutional roles, distinct from the command-and-control style of the departing military regime.
- b. **Structural Subversion: The Legacy of Hyper-Centralization:** The military operates on a strict hierarchical command structure. By superimposing this structure onto Nigeria's federal system, successive military regimes systematically hollowed out regional (and later state) autonomy. The federal legislature of the First Republic had been a vibrant theatre where regional interests were vigorously negotiated. The military replaced this consensus driven model with centralized decrees. Even when civilian rule returned in 1979, the new constitutional design (the 1979 Constitution) heavily favored a powerful center. The Exclusive Legislative List was significantly expanded at the expense of the Concurrent Legislative List, permanently weakening the legislative capacity of state houses of assembly to govern local affairs.²⁹
- c. **Subjugation to Executive Hegemony:** Thirteen years of absolute executive rule conditioned the civil service, the judiciary, and the public to view the executive as the sole, omnipotent driver of state policy. When the legislature was reintroduced in 1979, it was viewed by many,

²⁶ T. Falola and J.O. Ihonvbere, 'The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-1983' (London: Zed Books, 1985), p 22

²⁷ A.G. Karibi-Whyte, 'The Relevance of the Judiciary in the Governance of Nigeria' (Lagos: National Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, 1987), p 89.

²⁸ N. Nwodo, "The Legislature in Post-Military Nigeria: An Institutional Analysis," *Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2002) p 311

²⁹ J.I. Elaigwu, 'The Politics of Federalism in Nigeria' (Jos: Aha Publishing, 2005), p114



including the executive itself, as an expensive, obstructive, and largely redundant bottleneck. This entrenched executive hegemony has persisted into the Fourth Republic, where the legislature frequently fights a rear-guard action against executive overreach, pocket vetoes, and budget manipulation.³⁰

The military coup of January 15, 1966, did more than merely depose the government of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa; it fundamentally derailed the evolution of Nigeria's representative democracy. For thirteen critical years, while the nation's socio-economic architecture was expanding under the oil boom, the legislature was entirely absent. The impact of this interregnum on the trajectory of the Nigerian legislature cannot be overstated. It caused an acute loss of institutional memory, fostered a political culture habituated to centralized, executive command, and necessitated a radical constitutional shift to a presidential system in 1979. The institutional fragility, drafting deficiencies, and asymmetric power dynamics vis a vis the executive that still challenge the contemporary Nigerian National Assembly are direct legacies of those thirteen silent years when the gavel was replaced by the gun.

The Second Republic (1979-1983)

The second Republic ushered in the Presidential system of government and the 1979 Constitution. The origin of the Nigerian Presidential system can be traced back to the establishment of the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) in 1975 by the then Head of State, General Murtala Mohammed.³¹ The Federal Military Government at the time, instructed the CDC to move away from the institutionalized opposition of the parliamentary system to a system that will foster national unity and consensus politics. It also instructed the CDC to create a single executive Head of state with clearly defined powers, establish an independent judiciary and incorporate fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy. The efforts of the CDC culminated into a draft constitution in 1978 which was amended by the military government and promulgated as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Enactment) Decree 1978.³² This constitution officially came into force on October 1, 1979 thereby ushering in the 2nd Republic. **The 1979 constitution** brought about key Innovations at the time such as Federal Character, clear separation of Executive, legislative and judicial powers, the Executive Presidency and multi-party requirement.³³ Unlike the first Republic under the parliamentary system where there was a fusion of the executive and the legislature, the 1979 constitution brought about strict separation of powers as the President is not a member of the National Assembly. The 1979 constitution brought about a bicameral legislature at the centre with the Senate and the House of Representatives. Under this Constitution, Senators were no longer appointed as in the first Republic. Senators were elected. It abolished the bicameral legislature in the regions/states and introduced a unicameral legislature where there is only one State House of Assembly in every State.

The Fourth Republic (1999–Present): The Era of Oversight

The 1999 constitution came into force on the 29th of May 1999 which ushered in the Fourth Republic after 16 years of uninterrupted military rule in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution is basically

³⁰ J.L. Jinadu, "The Situation of the Legislature in Nigeria," *Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2003) p 405

³¹ B.O Nwabueze, "A Constitutional History of Nigeria", Longman Group Ltd (1982)

³² *Ibid*

³³ *Ibid*



the 1979 constitution with some alterations. The current 1999 constitution maintained the presidential system of government established under the 1979 constitution that was characterised by a bicameral legislature, a federal structure and clear separation of powers between the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary.³⁴

The 1999 Constitution drastically redefined the legislature's role. Legislative powers of the Federation were vested in a National Assembly.³⁵ The current National Assembly (unlike the one from Nigeria's First Republic) has the legal authority to carry out official investigations into anything they can legislate on and the people and Agencies running the country. The National Assembly is empowered to conduct investigations into any matter concerning which it has the power to make laws, as well as the conduct of affairs of any person, authority, ministry, or government department charged with the duty of executing or administering laws or disbursing funds appropriated by the National Assembly.³⁶ The Constitution provides that these powers of investigation are exercised only to Expose corruption, inefficiency, or waste in the execution or administration of laws within its legislative competence and in the disbursement or administration of funds and to Correct defects in existing laws.³⁷ The Constitution empowers the National Assembly to appoint committees for special or general purposes.³⁸ The 1999 Constitution further empowers Committees to summon persons, examine witnesses under oath and procure evidence.³⁹ Committees, public hearings and investigative panels are part of the oversight mechanisms of the National Assembly. In practicing these provisions, the National Assembly operates through a highly specialized framework of Standing and Ad-hoc Committees. Every Ministry, Department, and Agency (MDA) of the Federal Government falls under the oversight jurisdiction of a specific committee. These committees deploy various mechanisms such as Interactive Sessions and Budget Defence and on the Spot Assessments of capital projects nationwide to ensure that funds released matches work completed on the ground. Despite this formidable legal power, the exercise of legislative oversight in the Fourth Republic continues to face deep structural challenges. Oversight inquiries are frequently bogged down by political polarization, allegations of rent seeking or extortionist oversight behaviour by rogue committees, and a recurring friction with an executive branch that occasionally resists legislative compliance.

Ultimately, the Fourth Republic has successfully institutionalized the Nigerian legislature as a co-equal branch of government. From its humble origins as an powerless colonial advisory body in 1914, the legislature has evolved into an assertive institution. Through its expansive oversight powers under the 1999 Constitution, it remains a vital counterweight to executive power and a central pillar of democratic stability in contemporary Nigeria.

Conclusion

The institutional trajectory of the Nigerian legislature from the seminal amalgamation of 1914 to the consolidation of the Fourth Republic in 1999 represents one of the most remarkable evolutions in

³⁴ J.A Yakubu, "Constitutional Law in Nigeria", Demyaxs Law Books, Ibadan (2003)

³⁵ Section 4 of the 1999 constitution as amended

³⁶ Section 88 of the 1999 constitution as amended

³⁷ Section 88(2) of the 1999 constitution

³⁸ *Ibid* S.62(1)

³⁹ *Ibid* S. 89



Commonwealth constitutional history. Over nearly a century of radical systemic shifts, the legislative arm has evolved from a subservient tool of colonial administrative convenience into an assertive, co-equal branch of government within a sovereign federal republic. This profound metamorphosis reflects both the structural resilience of the institution and the broader, turbulent struggle of the Nigerian nation to attain true democratic governance. Ultimately, this historical progression demonstrates that the modern legislature's identity is defined by the transformation of its power. It is armed with the formidable oversight mechanisms of Sections 88 and 89 of the 1999 Constitution, positioning it as the ultimate custodian of public accountability and popular sovereignty. While this institutional growth was repeatedly stunted by protracted military interventions that dissolved or suspended legislative houses, the survival and continuous operation of the legislature into the Fourth Republic confirms its enduring necessity. As Nigeria continues to navigate the complexities of statutory reform, fiscal discipline, and democratic consolidation, a robust, transparent, and independent legislature remains not merely an analytical checkpoint of history, but the vital heartbeat of contemporary Nigerian democracy.

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