



AN APPRAISAL OF THE TRAJECTORY OF NIGERIA'S LEGISLATURE: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION, CONSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS, AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Lawmaking bodies serve as the beating heart of any democratic framework, executing indispensable roles ranging from drafting legislation and representing citizens to overseeing executive actions, managing public finances, and enforcing overall governmental accountability. The historical progression of this institution within the Nigerian state reveals a complex journey marked by early colonial administrative rule, brief periods of parliamentary democracy, forceful military interruptions, and the eventual adoption of the modern presidential framework under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Despite the explicit constitutional empowerment of the legislative branch, enduring structural challenges remain prevalent; these include an overpowering executive arm, fragile institutional frameworks, pervasive corrupt practices, compromised autonomy, and sub-optimal supervisory mechanisms. This manuscript rigorously evaluates the evolutionary path of the Nigerian legislature, situating its development within the intersections of historical transitions, constitutional modifications, political economy, and the broader spectrum of democratic administration. The research scrutinizes the constitutional underpinnings and democratic obligations of lawmakers while dissecting the core impediments that undermine their effectiveness and transparency. Findings reveal that while Nigerian lawmakers are vested with profound constitutional authority, their actual institutional maturation has been heavily stunted by the enduring shadows of colonialism, decades of authoritarian military regimes, prebendal political networks, and systemic corruption. Furthermore, ongoing disputes surrounding electoral modifications, legislative drafting discrepancies, and friction between the executive and legislative branches consistently highlight deep-seated vulnerabilities regarding parliamentary independence and constitutional adherence. The analysis establishes unequivocally that robust democratic governance is unachievable in the absence of a fiercely independent, highly capable legislature equipped to curb executive overreach and demand accountability. Consequently, the paper advocates for profound institutional and statutory overhauls designed to insulate lawmakers from external pressures, refine oversight protocols, boost professional competencies, and anchor democratic principles.



Ultimately, this study concludes that the long-term survival of constitutional stability and democratic governance in the nation is inextricably linked to the vitality and effectiveness of its legislative organs.

Keywords: *Lawmaking authority, constitutional governance, governmental checks and balances, post-independence administration, executive-parliamentary interaction.*

1.0 Introduction

On a global scale, legislative bodies transcend the mere mechanical enactment of laws; they operate as dynamic arenas for civic representation, rigorous debate, policy scrutiny, and governmental oversight. The legislature holds a pivotal vantage point in all democratic models, serving as a primary pillar necessary for the enduring survival of constitutional governance. Serving as the voice of the populace, this governmental branch executes essential duties that encompass drafting legislation, representing constituent interests, allocating state resources, and monitoring the activities of the executive arm. Within constitutional democracies, executing these responsibilities is critical for enforcing accountability, encouraging the active participation of citizens, and curbing the tyrannical or arbitrary use of state power.

Philosophers such as Montesquieu, in his seminal work *The Spirit of Laws*, championed the strict division of governmental authority to ensure that power inherently checks power, thereby preventing authoritarianism. Within the Nigerian context, the lawmaking body is formally recognized by the constitution as an equal and independent branch of government governed by the separation of powers. Nevertheless, continuous friction frequently emerges between the legislature and the executive, particularly concerning policy implementation and budgetary allocations, which sequentially hampers both political maturation and infrastructural advancement. Further compounding these issues are controversial executive actions, such as the questionable utilization of presidential pardons and the arbitrary suspension of the Chief Judicial Officer, which reflect this institutional discord.

Looking back, the institutional maturation of Nigeria's lawmaking bodies has been deeply influenced by the architectures of colonial administration, periods of military dictatorship, and the complex realities that define post-colonial African governance. During the colonial era, legislative assemblies were engineered predominantly to further the administrative and economic agendas of the British Empire, rather than to foster authentic democratic representation. The formal genesis of legislative frameworks in the nation occurred with the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1862. However, indigenous participation was severely restricted, and the colonial executive maintained an iron grip on all proceedings. Subsequent statutory milestones—including the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Richards Constitution of 1946, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951, and the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954—progressively widened the scope of local representation. These incremental adjustments ultimately formed the bedrock for the parliamentary system adopted when the nation achieved self-rule.

Nigeria's emergence as an independent sovereignty in 1960 signaled a monumental transition toward self-determination, featuring a federal parliamentary framework heavily inspired by the



British Westminster model. Unfortunately, the anticipated flowering of a democratic legislative culture was rapidly derailed by relentless political volatility, deep-seated ethnic rivalries, and eventual military incursions. The armed coups that commenced in 1966 initiated an era of dictatorial rule that severely crippled legislative institutions by aggressively centralizing all state authority within the executive branch. For the majority of the period spanning 1966 to 1999, save for fleeting civilian interludes, legislative assemblies were systematically dissolved or relegated to superficial, ceremonial entities devoid of true constitutional power. As a direct result, the contemporary Nigerian legislature was birthed into a political climate plagued by an overpowering executive, fragile administrative structures, patronage-driven politics, and tenuous democratic customs.

The nation's eventual transition back to democratic governance in 1999, ushering in the Fourth Republic, represented a watershed moment in the endeavor to reconstruct legislative bodies and revive constitutional supremacy. Since this democratic rebirth, both the National Assembly and the various State Houses of Assembly have progressively reclaimed their mandated roles through rigorous lawmaking, constitutional revisions, budget management, and executive oversight. Even so, these institutions continue to battle formidable political and structural headwinds. While they are legally endowed with broad representative and supervisory capabilities, actual legislative operations are routinely hindered by executive overreach, extreme partisan loyalty, systemic graft, a lack of operational capacity, and an overall deficit of public trust. These enduring vulnerabilities consistently trigger profound questions regarding the true autonomy, functional efficiency, and future evolutionary path of the legislature within the Nigerian democratic experiment.

As noted by Arishe, the legislature essentially functions as the deliberative nucleus of the government because it acts as the primary arena where society's diverse and often conflicting interests converge to demand attention. This perspective perfectly encapsulates the legislature's core identity as a crucible for political bargaining, the mitigation of societal conflicts, and the harmonization of disparate community needs. Despite this idealized role, the actual efficacy of legislative discourse in Nigeria is frequently derailed by chronic political volatility, the outsized influence of elite factions, and the tendency of informal power syndicates to overshadow formalized constitutional mechanisms.

The ongoing interaction between the executive and legislative branches remains arguably the most critical variable in the nation's constitutional evolution. This relationship is historically fraught with tension, significantly stalling the realization of optimal governance and democratic entrenchment. Montesquieu's classical articulation of the separation of powers is profoundly applicable here; he argued that liberty is entirely extinguished when legislative and executive authorities are fused within the same individual or administrative body. This fundamental philosophy highlights why institutional autonomy and reciprocal oversight are mandatory for functional governance.

In a similar vein, legal scholar Nwabueze posits that an excessive centralization of power within the executive stands as the most formidable peril to constitutional democracy across the African continent. Furthermore, Richard Joseph's introduction of the "prebendalism" concept explains that public offices in this region are frequently treated as personal fiefdoms to be exploited for the financial benefit of the officeholders and their immediate cronies. These academic insights lay bare the reality that informal, self-serving political maneuvers persistently dictate legislative actions and erode institutional independence in Nigeria.



Even though the Constitution endows lawmakers with formidable authority, their practical impact is often neutralized by an aggressive executive, a lack of institutional professionalism, pervasive corruption, and transactional political deal-making. Recent public disputes surrounding the modification of electoral and taxation statutes vividly illustrate that the lawmaking process remains highly susceptible to partisan warfare, technical drafting errors, and a broader crisis of public legitimacy.

Guided by this intricate backdrop, this article conducts a comprehensive examination of legislative maturation in Nigeria, viewing it through the multifaceted lenses of historical progression, constitutional changes, political economy, and democratic administration. The study rigorously dissects the foundational legal tenets, institutional growth, democratic obligations, and modern hurdles facing Nigeria's legislative bodies, ultimately offering targeted recommendations to elevate their functional performance.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Legislature

The legislature is universally understood as a formally constituted assembly, typically populated through popular elections, entrusted with the explicit mandate to draft, modify, or abolish legislation, while concurrently representing constituent interests and holding the ruling government in check. It serves as the ultimate institutional manifestation of representative democracy, functioning as the primary conduit through which the populace participates in state administration via their chosen delegates.

According to Nwabueze, this body acts as the specific governmental organ tasked with creating frameworks of law that ensure the peace, order, and overall welfare of the sovereign state. Correspondingly, Loewenberg describes legislatures as structured gatherings of elected officials drawn from geographically demarcated areas, heavily involved in the lawmaking dimensions of statecraft. In contemporary democratic paradigms, these assemblies also shoulder expansive investigative, financial oversight, and representational duties.

The structural composition of these bodies varies drastically across global political landscapes. Certain nations utilize a unicameral system, whereas others favor a bicameral setup featuring both an upper and lower house. In alignment with Section 4 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the nation operates a bicameral legislative framework at the federal echelon, which is divided into the Senate and the House of Representatives. Therefore, the legislative branch is an indispensable pillar of democratic governance, providing the indispensable legal architecture for public representation, official accountability, and the modulation of state power.

2.2 Legislative Development

The concept of legislative development pertains to the continuous enhancement and fortification of lawmaking bodies, specifically regarding their operational autonomy, functional capacity, overall efficacy, and institutional sophistication. This progression involves measurable upgrades to the mechanics of drafting laws, the robustness of oversight protocols, the administrative proficiency of legislative staff, and the assembly's genuine capacity to operate completely independent of executive coercion.



In the modern era, constitutions explicitly charge legislatures with the meticulous scrutiny of executive behavior, ensuring that all public authority is deployed strictly within the boundaries of legislative intent. This vital supervisory duty injects democratic validity into governance while operating as a formidable bulwark against dictatorial tendencies, corruption, and the misuse of public office.

Within the Nigerian landscape, the maturation of the legislature is inextricably tied to its escalating competence in executing these oversight mandates efficiently. The legislative chambers monitor the executive hierarchy to enforce transparency, guarantee accountability, and promote robust governance. This is practically achieved through deep investigative probes into the daily operations of state agencies. Ultimately, a highly developed legislative body is expected to act as an insurmountable check on executive overreach, safeguard the public treasury, champion civic involvement in policymaking, and cement the foundations of constitutional democracy.

2.3 Separation of Powers and Institutional Checks and Balances

The authority of the state invariably manifests across three distinct domains: the creation of laws, the administration of state affairs, and the judicial resolution of disputes. The doctrine of the separation of powers dictates a rigid operational boundary, ensuring that the legislative, executive, and judicial branches do not usurp or overlap into the constitutional territories of one another. Grasping this philosophical doctrine is a prerequisite for understanding true legislative development. It serves as a constitutional safeguard engineered to fragment governmental authority among the three branches, thereby staving off the dangerous concentration of power. Montesquieu's historic postulation stresses that human liberty is placed in grave peril the moment legislative and executive capacities are fused within a single authoritative entity. This doctrine actively neutralizes dictatorial threats by explicitly partitioning state functions into these three vital sectors.

Under Nigeria's contemporary presidential system, the powers of the state are meticulously dispersed across the three governmental arms via constitutional decree. The legislature is granted the exclusive prerogative to forge laws; the executive is responsible for actualizing these laws and state policies, while the judiciary is tasked with their legal interpretation. This strategic architectural design is purposefully implemented to guarantee mutual checks and balances, thereby foreclosing the possibility of systemic abuse of power.

2.4 Post-Colonial Governance and Institutional Context

The term post-colonial governance encapsulates the unique political and structural frameworks that materialized in former colonies following their attainment of sovereign independence. Such systems are typically distinguished by a complex amalgamation of formal constitutional edicts and entrenched, informal political habits, encompassing patronage networks, elite monopolization of power, and prebendal stratagems.

In Nigeria, this post-colonial reality has drastically shaped the evolutionary arc of the legislature, inadvertently embedding powerful executive command structures, deficient mechanisms for institutional accountability, and a hyper-personalized style of political leadership. As articulated by Richard Joseph through his framework of prebendalism, state offices in such environments are routinely weaponized as tools for personal and factional enrichment rather than avenues for civic service, which severely degrades the performance metrics of institutions, including the legislative branch.



These harsh realities of governance have left an indelible mark on Nigeria's legislative evolution. Even though the constitution nominally establishes the lawmaking body as a sovereign, independent entity, the pervasive undercurrents of informal political wheeling and dealing continually erode both its autonomy and structural effectiveness.

3.0 Trajectory of Legislative Institutions in Nigeria

3.1 Pre-Colonial Governance Structures

Long before British imperial forces established their presence in Nigeria, numerous indigenous ethnic groups had meticulously cultivated self-sustaining administrative frameworks anchored in their unique customary traditions. Prior to the influx of European interference across the African continent, these indigenous populations functioned as highly sophisticated kingdoms, centralized emirates, structured chiefdoms, and egalitarian communal networks, each wielding political and administrative dominance derived from profound cultural lineages. The genesis of these societal structures began with the nuclear family, which subsequently blossomed through intermarriage, population growth, migratory shifts, territorial conquest, and diplomatic annexations. These advanced civilizations possessed comprehensive legal architectures and intricate methodologies for dispensing justice—predominantly governed by customary law—alongside robust dispute resolution mechanisms and distinct correctional systems. This manuscript endeavors to explore the depth of these early frameworks.

Before the dawn of colonial subjection, the geopolitical entity now recognized as Nigeria was home to a rich tapestry of native political regimes. Although these models exhibited stark differences across various ethnic and geographic divides, they almost universally incorporated mechanisms that closely mirrored the functions of modern legislatures, heavily emphasizing communal consultation, rigorous deliberation, public accountability, and collective decision-making.

In the Northern territories, the Hausa/Fulani emirate architecture functioned as an intensely centralized bureaucracy commanded by Emirs, who wielded supreme political and administrative might, tightly bound by Islamic jurisprudence and the counsel of advisory councils. While the power dynamic was undeniably top-down, the governance model integrated vital advisory bodies, such as the Emir's inner council, which played a formidable role in shaping state directives.

In the Western regions, particularly within Yoruba societies, statecraft was defined by a constitutional monarchy where the ruling Oba governed in tandem with powerful chieftaincy councils, most notably the *Oyomesi*. The *Oyomesi* effectively operated as the legislative wing of the administration, actively checking the authority of the Alaafin within the Oyo Empire. Conversely, Igbo communities in the East depended heavily on egalitarian assemblies comprised of esteemed elders or general communal councils, which stood as the ultimate legislative authority.

These traditional councils wielded remarkable restraining power over monarchical figures, possessing the radical ability to force a tyrannical Alaafin into abdication if governance devolved into oppression. This highlights a very sophisticated, early manifestation of institutional restraint and democratic collaboration.

The Igbo civilization fostered a profoundly unique and efficient governance matrix defined by extreme decentralization, broad inclusivity, and mass civic participation. Governed through a consensus-oriented model, the system meticulously ensured that the grievances and opinions of every community member were accommodated. This highly participatory layout nurtured an



exceptional internal system of checks and balances, thereby making the tyrannical concentration of power virtually impossible. Although these legal codes were largely unwritten, they embodied the essence of participatory democracy.

These indigenous paradigms prove unequivocally that robust governance and accountability structures flourished in pre-colonial Nigeria well before the forceful introduction of Western legislative models. However, it is crucial to recognize that the advent of colonialism violently dismantled these organic systems, substituting them with rigid, centralized bureaucracies specifically engineered to serve foreign imperial ambitions.

3.2 Colonial Legislative Development (1861–1954)

The formal timeline of Nigeria's legislative history commenced under the shadow of British rule, during which representative councils were introduced primarily as instruments for administrative ease rather than genuine democratic enfranchisement. The structural genesis of these institutions was initiated by the British colonial government. Following the forceful annexation of Lagos in 1861, colonial authorities instituted the Legislative Council in 1862, specifically designed to aid the presiding colonial governor. Tasked with managing the affairs of the Lagos colony, the Governor relied on this Council for administrative support. However, it functioned almost exclusively in an advisory capacity and possessed zero representative legitimacy, given that its ranks were overwhelmingly filled by British appointees, accommodating only two Nigerian members.

The introduction of the Clifford Constitution in 1922 represented a profound turning point in Nigeria's constitutional narrative. It birthed a restructured Legislative Council, though this body remained entirely subservient to the Governor's veto power and his exclusive right to legislate for both the colony and the vast Southern Provinces. The newly minted Council consisted of 46 members: 27 official colonial representatives (including the Governor and Lieutenant-Governors), 15 nominated unofficial members (featuring six Nigerians), alongside three elected representatives for Lagos and one for Calabar. This constitutional iteration broadened the geographical legislative reach of the original 1862 Lagos Council to encompass the Southern Protectorate, effectively laying the groundwork for early parliamentary procedures.

These rudimentary legislative committees, while severely constrained in their authority, played an undeniable role in charting Nigeria's constitutional future. Despite this slow progress, true lawmaking authority remained entirely subordinate to the dictates of the colonial executive. While the Clifford Constitution did introduce the concept of localized representation, civic participation was heavily curtailed.

Subsequent constitutional frameworks systematically broadened these legislative structures and increased local representation. The elective principle introduced in 1922 was sustained and expanded within the 1946 Richards Constitution and the 1951 Macpherson Constitution, as each successive legal document sought to marginally boost the quota of elected Nigerians within the Colonial Council. The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 cemented a definitive federal architecture, introducing a Central Legislative Assembly operating in harmony with regional legislative houses. This 1954 framework irreversibly embedded federalism into the Nigerian political psyche, distributing lawmaking competence across both national and regional platforms.

This evolution represented a monumental leap toward the decentralization of state governance. It fortified legislative administration and laid fertile ground for the subsequent development and



proliferation of comprehensive committee systems across various legislative tiers. Yet, regardless of these administrative strides, colonial-era assemblies remained inescapably tethered to executive dominance and functioned primarily to fulfill colonial objectives. Ultimately, this protracted colonial experience deeply entrenched a culture of executive supremacy that would continue to heavily influence Nigeria's post-independence governance.

3.3 Independence and Early Legislature (1960–1966)

The chronological window extending from 1960 to 1966 is historically designated as Nigeria's First Republic. Commencing on October 1, 1960, and transitioning through the adoption of the 1963 Republican Constitution, this era brought profound changes. The foundational 1960 Independence Constitution established a fully functional bicameral legislature. This document explicitly dictated the creation of a Parliament of the Federation, comprising Her Majesty, a Senate, and a House of Representatives. It simultaneously formalized the position of the Governor-General. The statutory text stipulated the appointment of a Governor-General serving as the Commander-in-Chief of the Federation, directly appointed by, and serving at the pleasure of, Her Majesty as her official representative within the nation.

Within this structural arrangement, the legislative branch was positioned at the very core of national governance, with executive power constitutionally tethered to parliamentary approval and confidence. Section 37 of this constitutional document mandated the inclusion of twelve Senators representing each respective Region, chosen during joint sessions of the regional legislative bodies from a pool of individuals nominated directly by the Governor. Additionally, four Senators were selected to represent the Federal territory, while the Governor-General personally handpicked four more Senators based on the specific advisement of the Prime Minister.

On October 1, 1963, Nigeria officially transitioned into a Republic, accompanied by a revised Constitution that formally abolished the Governor-General title, replacing it with a President acting as the ceremonial Head of State, while the Prime Minister retained the role of Head of Government. This Constitution legally established the Presidential office, stating that a President of the Republic would be elected following Section 35 protocols to serve as the Supreme Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Federation's armed forces.

This document dictated precise electoral procedures for this role: The President was to be chosen via a secure secret ballot during a joint assembly of both Houses of Parliament, specifically convened for this electoral purpose. During this designated election meeting, every active Member of Parliament was granted a single vote in the presidential ballot.

The newly inaugurated National Assembly, featuring both the Senate and the House of Representatives, leaned heavily on established parliamentary Standing Orders to create and manage their committee systems, as the foundational 1960 Constitution lacked explicit provisions regarding their formation. Throughout this era, these legislative committees began to adopt a significantly more aggressive role in auditing public expenditures, actively partnering with the Auditor-General to enforce transparency and financial propriety within state operations. However, the functional growth and overall efficacy of this committee framework during the First Republic were severely stunted by relentless political friction and surging regional hostilities.

This Post-Independence Legislature operated with exceedingly few constitutional roadblocks, wielding the drafting of laws as its most potent mechanism for shaping the state. Lawmakers



possessed vast, unhindered authority to promulgate legislation dictating the political, economic, and socio-cultural trajectory of the young nation. This epoch was instrumental in forming Nigeria's enduring legal and institutional architecture, as numerous foundational statutes and procedural norms formulated during this time became the permanent bedrock for future assemblies. Tragically, the viability of this parliamentary democracy was aggressively eroded by incessant political turbulence, ethnic rivalries, brutal electoral violence, and deep-seated regional animosity. The legislative chambers devolved into highly polarized ethnic factions, with political entities fiercely prioritizing localized, sectional benefits far above cohesive national progress.

The total collapse of the First Republic, precipitated by the violent military coup of January 1966, abruptly extinguished the nation's parliamentary experiment. The incoming military junta immediately suspended the constitutional framework, dismantled all legislative assemblies, and consolidated absolute governmental authority securely within the executive apparatus of the military command.

3.4 Military Rule and Legislative Suspension (1966–1979)

The era of military dictatorship stands out as the most devastating interruption to the evolutionary growth of Nigeria's legislative bodies. Throughout the expanse from 1966 to 1979, the nation's lawmaking institutions were completely eradicated or ruthlessly downgraded to mere symbolic advisory panels entirely stripped of constitutional potency. State administration during this dark period was defined by rigid, centralized command hierarchies, governance via unilateral executive decrees, and an atmosphere of absolute authoritarianism.

On January 15, 1966, military forces successfully ousted Nigeria's civilian leadership, triggering the dawn of protracted military dominion. In the immediate aftermath of this insurrection, the military elite promulgated the Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree, which is today recognized as an Act. This draconian edict abruptly suspended vast segments of the 1963 Republican Constitution, actively rewriting remaining clauses to flawlessly align with the operational dictates of the new military regime. The underlying objective of this military seizure was to radically re-engineer the Nigerian state to mirror the centralized, top-down philosophy characteristic of armed forces command structures.

Following this initial violent overthrow in 1966, the country endured a rapid succession of military administrations. These included the regimes of Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi (January 15, 1966 – July 29, 1966), General Yakubu Gowon (July 30, 1966 – July 29, 1975), General Murtala Mohammed (July 29, 1975 – February 13, 1976), General Olusegun Obasanjo (February 13, 1976 – September 30, 1979), Major General Muhammadu Buhari (December 31, 1983 – August 27, 1985), General Ibrahim Babangida (August 27, 1985 – August 26, 1993), General Sani Abacha (November 17, 1993 – June 8, 1998), and lastly, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (June 8, 1998 – May 29, 1999).

Cumulatively, military commanders dictated the affairs of Nigeria for roughly thirty-six years out of its initial six decades as an independent entity. This agonizingly long stretch of military subjugation inflicted deep wounds on the nation's political and legal maturation, fundamentally because the supreme authority of the Constitution was aggressively usurped by arbitrary military decrees and absolute centralized control. Even so, despite the catastrophic damage inflicted upon democratic institutions, military governance was not utterly devoid of long-term constitutional impact. Certain military leaders introduced structural reforms and managed transition blueprints that inadvertently contributed to the later development of Nigeria's modern constitutional framework.



By 1979, the country successfully transitioned into a full presidential system of government. The new Constitution adopted during this transition represented a massive leap forward in formalizing legislative committees. It distinctly empowered the National Assembly with the unassailable constitutional right to inaugurate both standing and ad hoc committees. The deliberate inclusion of these committee mandates within the constitutional text radically bolstered the legislature's capacity for oversight and magnified its influence over public administration.

Historically, military juntas rationalized their aggressive dissolution of democratic structures by citing urgent national security threats and severe political chaos. Regardless of these justifications, the extended duration of military oversight fatally eroded legislative customs, destroyed democratic accountability, and permanently hardwired executive supremacy into the very fabric of Nigeria's political ecosystem.

Acknowledging the monumental complexity of drafting laws and the inherent risk of its misuse by legislators, the constitution strategically subjected legislative lawmaking to the vigilant supervisory jurisdiction of the judiciary. Consequently, lawmakers could only legally enact statutes that were entirely congruent with constitutional provisions.

However, during the dark days of military rule, no legislative body was permitted to function efficiently enough to hold Military Heads of State to any standard of accountability. These military commanders functioned as absolute executive overlords. They routinely deployed decrees and brutal coercive tactics to bypass accountability, ensuring that no independent watchdog could monitor their actions. Even when slight windows for free expression appeared, such liberties were violently crushed by the sweeping decree powers of the ruling junta. The ultimate outcome of this dynamic was the total obliteration of free speech, coupled with the absolute dominance of the executive over any residual legislative functions. Such a suffocating environment completely halted any prospect of meaningful economic, societal, cultural, or political advancement.

This profound concentration of authority within the executive echelon not only nurtured deeply authoritarian political habits but also effectively neutralized any semblance of constitutional checks and balances.

3.5. Second Republic (1979–1983)

The dawn of the Second Republic introduced a robust presidential system heavily inspired by the constitutional blueprint of the United States. Under the parameters of the 1979 Constitution, total legislative authority was securely vested within a bicameral National Assembly, formally split into the Senate and the House of Representatives. This newly adopted presidential model aimed to vigorously reinforce the separation of powers and ensure total institutional independence across all branches of government.

This era saw the explosive growth of various legislative structures, including the creation of numerous Special, Joint, Standing, and Ad hoc committees specifically targeting sectors like Appropriations, Agriculture, Education, and Foreign Affairs. These specialized units became heavily involved in dissecting federal budget proposals, auditing government agencies, and critically evaluating state policies.

Throughout the Second Republic, lawmakers vigorously flexed their oversight muscles and engaged intimately with the governance machinery. The 1979 constitutional document provided a much firmer legal grounding for the practical application of the separation of powers. Unfortunately,



intense friction between the executive and legislative branches, widespread corruption, volatile political landscapes, and severe economic downturns continuously compromised democratic progress. The insidious nature of political patronage and a blatant lack of internal party discipline further crippled legislative efficiency.

In the early hours of December 31, 1983, the nation was abruptly thrust back into authoritarianism via a swift and ruthless military coup that definitively crushed the Second Republic. This forceful military intervention once again dismantled civilian governance and dissolved all legislative bodies, brutally severing the thread of democratic continuity and stalling institutional growth.

3.6. Fourth Republic and Modern Legislature (1999–PRESENT)

The triumphant return of democratic administration in 1999 announced the birth of the Fourth Republic, simultaneously facilitating the resurrection of legislative assemblies under the legal umbrella of the 1999 Constitution. From that moment forward, both the federal National Assembly and the respective State Houses of Assembly have firmly established themselves as the pivotal engines driving Nigeria's democratic processes.

The current Constitution explicitly anchors all legislative authority securely within the National Assembly. This mandate encompasses the sweeping authority to construct laws ensuring the peace, stability, and optimal governance of the entire federation. From a strict constitutional standpoint, Section 4 (2) of the 1999 Constitution explicitly dictates that the National Assembly holds the sovereign power to enact laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Federation—or any specific segment of it—concerning any issue itemized within the Exclusive Legislative List detailed in Part 1 of the Second Schedule of the Constitution.

4.0 Constitutional Powers and Functions of the Legislature

The legislature stands as one of the three foundational pillars of the government, legally endowed with the massive responsibility of formulating laws, checking executive actions, amplifying the voice of the citizenry, and commanding total control over public finances. Within Nigeria, this vast authority flows directly from Section 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), which securely lodges legislative power within the National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly. This intricate constitutional design also meticulously divides legislative jurisdiction between the federal and state governments via the Exclusive and Concurrent Legislative Lists located in the Second Schedule.

4.1 Lawmaking Function

The formulation of legislation remains the paramount and most recognizable duty of the legislature. Section 4(1) grants the legislative powers of the entire Federation exclusively to the National Assembly, while Section 4(6) similarly delegates state-level legislative powers to the respective Houses of Assembly. Moving further, Section 4(2) unambiguously asserts the National Assembly's jurisdiction to create laws for the peace, order, and good governance of the nation regarding all items on the Exclusive Legislative List. Concurrently, Section 4(4) stretches this authority to encompass matters detailed in the Concurrent Legislative List, alongside any other subjects explicitly authorized by constitutional provisions.

The Constitution rigorously moderates the boundaries of this lawmaking power. In scenarios where a statute drafted by a State House of Assembly clashes with a legally valid federal enactment, the federal law automatically takes precedence, rendering the state law null and void strictly to the



extent of its inconsistency. Furthermore, Section 4(8) explicitly submits all legislative power to the ultimate interpretive jurisdiction of the judiciary, while Section 4(9) strictly forbids the legislature from passing any criminal statutes that operate retroactively. These carefully crafted provisions clearly illustrate that while Nigeria's lawmaking powers are exceptionally broad, they remain tightly bound by constitutional checks.

4.2 Oversight Function

The supervisory mandate arms the legislature with the necessary tools to aggressively monitor executive operations, guaranteeing that all state power is deployed lawfully, ethically, and responsibly. The Constitution expressly grants each chamber of the National Assembly the formidable power to launch deep investigations into any matter over which it possesses lawmaking authority, as well as into the conduct and affairs of any individual, state authority, ministry, or government department responsible for administering these laws. Moreover, the legal framework sanctions exhaustive investigations into the management, disbursement, and general administration of all financial resources that have been, or will be, appropriated by the legislative branch.

An identical supervisory power is bestowed upon the State Houses of Assembly by the Constitution, legally empowering them to probe issues within their localized legislative boundaries, including the strict oversight of state public funds. These statutory directives firmly establish legislative oversight as an indispensable constitutional weapon for enforcing accountability, combatting systemic corruption, and conducting rigorous administrative performance reviews.

4.3 Representative Function

The representational role stands as arguably the most vital democratic obligation of the legislative branch. While the literal phrase "representative function" does not appear as a singular term within the constitutional text, the entire architecture of the document makes this duty an unmistakable, implicit reality stemming from the electoral composition of the lawmakers. Section 4 defines the parameters of legislative power, whereas Chapter 5 explicitly outlines the guidelines for the citizens' representatives who will wield this power, rigorously detailing the electoral prerequisites for joining the National Assembly or the State Houses of Assembly.

The core representative essence of the legislature is massively fortified by the Constitution's electoral blueprint, which strictly mandates that lawmakers must be democratically elected from clearly defined geographic constituencies to act as the authentic voice of the masses. This structural requirement injects undeniable democratic legitimacy into every legislative action, as it is powered by a direct popular mandate rather than an arbitrary executive appointment.

4.4 Appropriation and Financial Control

The lawmaking body also exercises absolute supremacy over the state treasury via its appropriation duties and expenditure authorizations. The Constitution firmly dictates that all federally generated revenues must be deposited directly into the Consolidated Revenue Fund. Crucially, it mandates that not a single unit of currency can be extracted from this Fund unless the withdrawal is specifically intended to satisfy expenditures explicitly charged upon it by the Constitution itself, or unless the withdrawal is legally authorized through an Appropriation Act or a Supplementary Appropriation Act. The President is legally obligated to submit comprehensive estimates detailing anticipated revenue and proposed expenditures before the National Assembly, and any attempts to



withdraw funds prior to official appropriation are legally permissible only under exceedingly strict, limited conditions.

At the subnational tier, identically crucial financial control functions are executed by the State Houses of Assembly. These constitutional mandates unequivocally position the legislature as the ultimate guardian of the public purse. Through the mechanism of appropriation, the legislature holds the power to authorize all state spending, fundamentally shape national development priorities, and aggressively subject all executive financial behavior to intense democratic scrutiny.

Additionally, the legislature exerts heavy oversight concerning high-level executive appointments through its constitutional confirmation powers. A vast array of critical appointments initiated by the President or state Governors absolutely require legislative vetting and approval before they can take legal effect. At the national echelon, the Senate holds the exclusive mandate to confirm the selections for the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Supreme Court Justices, Federal Ministers, international Ambassadors, and the Chairpersons and governing members of federal executive agencies. Concurrently, State Houses of Assembly conduct confirmation hearings for analogous appointments made by Governors at the regional level.

Therefore, the legislative jurisdiction of the National Assembly is exceptionally expansive on a formal level. It reaches far beyond mere symbolic rubber-stamping, encompassing legitimate, actionable law-making authority capable of steering macro-national policy. In theory, this positions the legislature as the supreme focal point of state governance. The Constitution further insulates the legislature by granting it highly specific powers and operational procedures. However, it is an undeniable reality that constitutional authority only holds value when it is practically and courageously exercised. Within Nigeria, the glaring chasm between theoretical constitutional empowerment and actual institutional performance remains one of the most severe bottlenecks to legislative evolution.

The legislature is further armed with immense emergency and accountability capabilities. The President retains the right to declare a formal state of emergency across the entire Federation or within a specific sector. Nonetheless, such a sweeping proclamation is completely reliant on the official approval of a two-thirds majority within both chambers of the National Assembly, secured strictly within a constitutionally mandated timeframe; failure to achieve this nullifies the declaration instantly.

The acceptable grounds for triggering a state of emergency are legally restricted to:

- An active state of war or an impending foreign invasion.
- A catastrophic breakdown of public order and general civic safety.
- Severe natural disasters or overwhelming public calamities.
- Direct, existential threats to the continued survival of the Federation.

Taking this a step further, the legislature is armed with the ultimate constitutional power to forcibly remove the President, Vice-President, state Governors, and Deputy Governors from their offices via rigorous impeachment protocols, specifically on the grounds of gross misconduct. This stands as a vital, non-negotiable mechanism to enforce strict accountability at the very peak of the executive branch.



Section 58 (1) clearly articulates that the law-making capabilities of the National Assembly are actualized through the successful passage of bills by the Assembly, followed by the official assent of the President. Similarly, Section 9 of the Constitution grants the National Assembly the profound power to amend or alter any segment of the 1999 Constitution. However, this monumental process demands the explicit backing, via official resolution, of the Houses of Assembly in at least two-thirds of the states comprising the Federation.

The legislative houses established by this supreme legal document also command auxiliary powers that, while not explicitly spelled out, are intrinsically connected to their mandates. A landmark Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Attorney-General of Ondo State v Attorney-General of the Federation* definitively clarified that the National Assembly maintains the legal right to legislate on peripheral matters directly connected to core constitutional objectives, even if those specific matters are missing from the formal text of the Exclusive or Concurrent Legislative Lists.

5.0 Legislative Development and Political Economy

The progressive evolution of Nigeria's legislative bodies is impossible to analyze in isolation from the deeply entrenched structures of the nation's political economy. Within the country, legislative growth has navigated a treacherous historical path spanning pre-colonial communal systems, exploitative colonial frameworks, fragmented post-independence democratic attempts, brutal military dictatorships, and modern democratic adaptations. Across a multitude of African nations, including Nigeria, legislative assemblies were initially erected by colonial masters almost entirely to streamline administrative control and maximize economic pillaging, rather than to foster an environment of democratic representation or civic empowerment. As a direct consequence, the foundational structures of postcolonial African legislatures were inherently brittle, heavily reliant on executive direction, and almost entirely disconnected from any genuine concept of democratic accountability.

In the specific case of Nigeria, the trajectory of legislative institutionalization has weathered numerous historical epochs, from indigenous rule and colonial constitutionalism to early democratic trials, prolonged military strangleholds, and the current democratic dispensation of the Fourth Republic. These sprawling historical events have dramatically sculpted the architectural framework, authoritative scope, and practical efficiency of lawmaking institutions nationwide. In spite of robust constitutional reforms and a stable democratic transition, massive political economy variables—such as overwhelming executive dominance, the aggressive pursuit of elite interests, entrenched patronage networks, and brutal conflicts over access to state wealth—continue to aggressively dictate legislative behavior and cripple institutional output.

The executive branch aggressively maintains an outsized level of influence over both the formulation of public policy and broader political management. Although the legislative branch is theoretically and constitutionally autonomous, it frequently finds itself at the mercy of the executive for crucial budgetary allocations, the actual implementation of its drafted policies, and ultimately, its own political survival. This structural dependency deeply erodes legislative independence, drastically diminishing the assembly's genuine capacity to operate as a self-sufficient body capable of forcefully restraining executive overreach.

This suffocating dominance of the executive over national policymaking possesses deep historical roots within the Nigerian state. According to the profound findings contained within the Report of the Political Bureau, it is widely acknowledged that prior to 1979, the legislative assemblies



represented the absolute weakest link in the chain of public policy formulation. Tracing back from the inception of the Nigerian Council by Lord Lugard—shortly after the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates—through to the conclusion of the first thirteen years of military governance, the executive maintained a total monopoly on policy creation. The situation was so dire that a prominent national newspaper in 1963 infamously derided the Federal Legislature as nothing more than an extravagantly expensive and utterly irrelevant "talking shop".

The rigid control exerted by political party hierarchies and the pervasive culture of patronage also heavily distort the operational conduct of Nigerian lawmakers. On countless occasions, legislators deliberately elevate blind party loyalty, subservience to executive whims, and the pursuit of lucrative political patronage far above their institutional obligation to remain independent and engage in principled, objective debate. As a direct consequence, legislative outputs become the product of transactional political haggling and closed-door elite negotiations, rather than the result of objective policy analysis or a genuine desire to serve the public interest. This transactional environment severely degrades the legislature's capacity to function as an independent arbiter of law and a vigilant oversight body.

Furthermore, rampant electoral irregularities continuously siphon away the democratic legitimacy and functional accountability of the legislative branch. A significant fraction of sitting lawmakers secured their seats via heavily compromised, sham elections, leading to a scenario where they do not genuinely view themselves as authentic representatives of the masses, nor do the voting public recognize them as such. These fraudulent electoral practices are intensely destructive to national advancement. Much like blatant ballot-rigging, the manipulative tactics deployed by immense political party machines not only obstruct the true democratic will of the people from surfacing, but they also condition lawmakers to feel a primary sense of allegiance to these shadowy party machines rather than to the constituents they theoretically serve. This toxic paradigm relentlessly weakens the fabric of representative democracy and halts national socio-economic progress.

Legislative operations are also heavily manipulated by formidable economic syndicates and wealthy individuals who completely dominate the political and electoral arenas. Financially powerful elites routinely leverage their vast wealth to skew election outcomes, dictate policy directions, and aggressively reshuffle legislative priorities to suit their corporate agendas. This heavy-handed economic interference leads directly to legislative capture, essentially neutering the institution's independence and completely obliterating democratic accountability.

Therefore, true legislative autonomy remains severely straightjacketed by the combined forces of executive intimidation, rigid party demands, and elite economic monopolization. Achieving meaningful legislative development demands significantly more than just the mere constitutional acknowledgment of legislative powers. It necessitates sweeping, aggressive political reforms, the cultivation of a resilient democratic culture, the establishment of uncompromising institutional norms, fierce internal discipline among lawmakers, and an unshakeable commitment to constitutionalism and total transparency. Ultimately, resilient, autonomous, and functionally potent legislatures are absolutely non-negotiable prerequisites for the survival of democratic governance, constitutional order, and comprehensive national development in Nigeria.

6.0 Legislature and Democratic Governance

The legislature sits at the very epicenter of democratic governance, owing strictly to its massive constitutional burdens which include drafting laws, ensuring representation, conducting oversight,



managing national appropriations, and enforcing strict governmental accountability. The survival and flourishing of any democratic state are entirely dependent upon the presence of formidable legislative institutions that are fully equipped to defend constitutionalism, enforce transparency, and fiercely advocate for the welfare of the public.

Within any functional democratic matrix, the legislature acts as the critical institutional bridge connecting the ruling government directly to the governed citizens. Through the intricate processes of civic representation, exhaustive deliberation, and statutory enactment, the raw demands and collective interests of the society are systematically distilled into actionable policies and binding laws. Additionally, the legislative body rigorously interrogates executive maneuvers to guarantee that all governmental authority is wielded strictly within the legal confines of the constitution and exclusively for the collective good of the populace.

The Nigerian legislature has journeyed through drastically different constitutional and political eras, spanning exploitative colonial administration, fragile parliamentary democracy, brutal military dictatorship, and the contemporary presidential framework characterizing the Fourth Republic. Throughout the devastating periods of military authoritarianism, legislative assemblies were entirely outlawed and suspended; this deliberate erasure deeply weakened the foundations of democratic governance, eradicated constitutional accountability, and made a mockery of the separation of powers doctrine. Conversely, since the highly anticipated return to democratic rule in 1999, the National Assembly has aggressively assumed a central, indispensable role in pushing constitutional amendments, fighting for electoral overhauls, dissecting national budgets, leading high-profile anti-corruption probes, and exerting tight oversight over sprawling executive agencies.

While the creation of laws stands as the most outwardly visible manifestation of legislative authority, the duty of true civic representation remains equally critical to the health of democratic governance. Elected officials bear the heavy expectation to passionately vocalize the needs and distresses of their respective constituencies, engage actively in the macro-level formulation of national policy, and fight to ensure that the government's trajectory accurately mirrors the desires of the common citizen. In scenarios where this representative obligation is neglected or weakened, the entire democratic apparatus becomes alarmingly unresponsive and rapidly devolves into an oligarchy managed exclusively by elite factions.

The monumental importance of legislative assemblies in sustaining democratic governance is widely validated on the international stage. As highlighted by the Economic Commission for Africa in its comprehensive review regarding the "Role of Legislature in Promoting Good Governance in Africa," it is explicitly stated that parliament is vital to the very lifeblood of a nation. The report emphasizes that it executes three dominant duties: formulating new laws, modifying or scrapping outdated statutes, and serving as the primary arena where the views of the citizenry are fused into the state's decision-making matrix. The Commission further notes that a vigilant parliament oversees executive behavior to secure total accountability. The realization of optimal governance relies completely on the existence of a highly efficient, robust parliament, simply because this institution is responsible for aggregating the needs of the masses and translating their aspirations into a concrete national development agenda. As an oversight mechanism, the parliament is uniquely positioned to spot emerging crises, tackle policy bottlenecks, and violently break through bureaucratic stagnation.



Legislative supervision easily ranks as one of the most potent mechanisms available for driving accountability and institutionalizing good governance. Through the strategic deployment of committee investigations, open public hearings, forensic budget reviews, and aggressive inquisitorial proceedings, the legislative branch meticulously tracks the actions of the executive, forcing public administrators to thoroughly defend their policy choices and account for every unit of public expenditure. When executed efficiently, this oversight is instrumental in uncovering hidden corruption, administrative incompetence, blatant abuses of power, and disastrous policy missteps within state organs.

The Nigerian Constitution graciously awards sweeping supervisory powers to both the National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly. These robust constitutional clauses legally entitle lawmakers to launch deep probes into the behavioral conduct of public institutions, rigorously track the ground-level implementation of enacted laws, and drag inefficiency, financial squander, or deeply rooted corruption within the civil service out into the open. Furthermore, the legislature holds the unassailable constitutional right to carefully screen and validate the highest-level appointees of the executive branch; in extreme instances of misconduct, it commands the ultimate authority to orchestrate the removal of the President, Vice President, Governors, or Deputy Governors via the rigid impeachment frameworks embedded in the Constitution.

In spite of these impressive constitutional endowments, the true operational efficiency of the legislature in Nigeria remains hamstrung by severe, paralyzing challenges. These impediments include blatant executive meddling, systemic financial corruption, rampant political cross-carpeting, severe deficits in institutional capacity, and a shocking lack of adequate research or technical backing. More often than not, the dynamic between the executive and legislative arms is defined by murky political horse-trading, outright conflict, and destructive institutional sabotage, all of which progressively erode the constitutional equilibrium and poison democratic accountability.

Modern democratic governance has simultaneously broadened the expectations placed upon legislatures, pushing them far beyond classic lawmaking to aggressively encompass post-legislative evaluation and deep scrutiny functions. Contemporary legislative bodies are facing immense pressure to actively track and scientifically evaluate the real-world impact and effectiveness of their laws, ensuring that legislation actually fulfills its intended socio-economic objectives. This evolutionary pivot highlights a massive global shift toward prioritizing legislative quality, maximizing policy impact, and enforcing accountability at all levels of democratic governance.

Tragically, within Nigeria, this crucial practice of post-legislative scrutiny remains entirely informal, dangerously underdeveloped, and largely ignored, completely defying the massive oversight authority granted by the Constitution. Profound structural flaws, a glaring absence of technical proficiency, and an incredibly weak research infrastructure persistently derail any attempts at meaningful legislative evaluation or sustained policy tracking.

Notwithstanding this myriad of crippling challenges, the legislative branch remains absolutely indispensable for the deep consolidation of democracy, the preservation of constitutional order, the maintenance of political harmony, and the overarching socio-economic development of Nigeria. Achieving genuine democratic consolidation mandates the cultivation of legislatures that are structurally invincible, completely constitutionally autonomous, highly professional, and fully capable of executing their massive constitutional duties without bowing to undue executive intimidation.



7.0 Contemporary Issues and Recent Controversies

The intense recent debates surrounding sweeping electoral reforms explicitly demonstrate that the path of legislative development in Nigeria remains a violently contested political battleground. Statutes governing elections are hypersensitive by nature because they dictate the very rules of democratic survival and competition. Proposed alterations to the Electoral Act have consistently sparked massive national controversies, particularly when such amendments threaten to compromise operational transparency, manipulate election schedules, or shatter the already fragile public confidence in the voting framework. These intense disputes definitively underscore the legislature's paramount role in constructing the rules that govern democratic engagement.

Discussions surrounding tax reform have similarly exposed glaring vulnerabilities regarding the technical quality of legislative drafting. Whenever statutory documents are sloppily constructed, the resulting ambiguities inevitably breed vicious legal disputes, administrative chaos, and severe economic paralysis. Within the context of an emerging democracy, these drafting errors are not mere technicalities; they actively corrode the public's faith in the entire law-making apparatus. Therefore, genuine legislative maturation relies not solely on the sheer volume of bills passed, but critically on the linguistic integrity, precision, and unassailable quality of the final legislative texts.

The reservoir of public trust serves as the ultimate metric for assessing legislative legitimacy. When the citizenry harbors deep suspicions that laws are recklessly crafted, secretly manipulated post-passage, or heavily corrupted by shadow interest groups, overall confidence in the institution plummets drastically. This erosion of faith is exceptionally dangerous within a constitutional democracy, where the act of legislation is inherently designed to reflect the pure will of the masses and guarantee absolute legal stability.

Furthermore, the operational dynamics within state-level assemblies perfectly illustrate the extreme vulnerability of legislative bodies at the subnational tier. In the vast majority of cases, these regional assemblies operate as mere extensions of state governors, heavily subjugated by local party machines and suffocated by political patronage systems. This widespread subnational paralysis firmly proves that any authentic evaluation of legislative development must be comprehensively measured across both the federal and state spheres, rather than focusing exclusively on the National Assembly in isolation.

Within the realm of modern governance, legislative institutions have drastically expanded their operational scope well beyond primitive law-making to heavily embrace accountability, deep oversight, and continuous evaluative duties. Advanced democracies operate strictly on the principle of distributed governmental power—shared dynamically among the legislative, executive, and judicial arms—with each nation's constitution meticulously organizing the boundaries and intersections of these powers. This structural design does not seek to isolate the branches rigidly, but rather to foster a highly structured, interactive ecosystem that empowers checks and balances, thereby ensuring optimal governance. The act of intensely monitoring and auditing the ground-level implementation of laws to guarantee they hit their intended targets is vital. This evolutionary leap originates from a profound philosophical shift in legislative operational logic: pivoting away from the mere volume of enacted laws toward a relentless focus on the qualitative impact and actual efficacy of those laws in society.

In contemporary Nigeria, the legal bedrock empowering the National Assembly to conduct aggressive oversight is firmly embedded within the provisions of Sections 88, 89, 128, and 129 of



the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). These specific constitutional clauses arm lawmakers with the undeniable authority to shadow the execution of state laws and aggressively expose administrative incompetence, fiscal waste, or deep-seated corruption within public policy management. Deeply ingrained within this supervisory mandate is the implied duty of the legislature to scientifically evaluate whether the statutes it enacts are actually resolving the societal issues they were designed to fix. Yet, in glaring contrast to these formidable constitutional empowerments, the actual practice of post-legislative scrutiny remains tragically primitive and largely non-existent.

The absolute entrenchment of democratic consolidation demands the presence of fiercely capable legislatures that execute their constitutional burdens with total independence, extreme competence, and unwavering responsibility.

8.0 Findings and Implications

This comprehensive investigation meticulously analyzed the evolutionary trajectory of legislative institutions in Nigeria, situating them within the expansive realities of historical progression, constitutional adjustments, political economy variables, and democratic governance. The extensive findings and subsequent implications extracted from this study definitively indicate the following:

- The legislative branch remains unequivocally one of the most vital, foundational pillars of constitutional democracy and proper democratic governance. By vigorously executing its massive duties involving the formulation of laws, constituent representation, executive oversight, financial appropriation, and structural constitutional amendments, the assembly actively champions government accountability, systemic transparency, constitutional adherence, massive civic engagement, and overall democratic stability.
- Even though Nigerian lawmakers are heavily armed with expansive constitutional authority strictly defined by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), their actual institutional evolution and practical effectiveness have been severely stunted. These limitations are directly tied to the lasting toxicity of colonial administrative systems, the destructive legacy of extended military dictatorships, hyper-prebendal political maneuvering, an incredibly dominant executive branch, and overwhelmingly weak internal institutional capacities.
- The broader political and economic climate heavily dictates the functional effectiveness of the legislature. Massive political economy disruptions—such as systemic corruption, ruthless patronage networks, unchecked elite monopolization, the extreme monetization of political campaigns, vicious battles over national wealth, and a glaring lack of genuine party ideology—continue to profoundly dictate the behavioral patterns of lawmakers, cripple institutional outputs, and shatter democratic accountability.
- True, robust democratic governance is completely impossible to achieve without the presence of a fiercely independent, highly capable, and fully accountable legislature. Legislative bodies act as the ultimate institutional conduit connecting the ruling state to the common people via rigorous representation, lawmaking, and continuous oversight. As a direct result, any structural weakness within the legislature immediately and violently degrades democratic consolidation, erodes constitutional order, and invites severe political instability.



- Total legislative autonomy is a non-negotiable prerequisite for the survival of democratic governance. In scenarios where legislative assemblies are forced to depend financially, politically, or administratively on the mercy of the executive branch, their supervisory and representational capabilities are immediately and fatally compromised. Therefore, the overpowering dominance of the executive remains one of the most dangerous, paralyzing obstacles to true legislative maturation in Nigeria, as well as in countless other developing democracies.
- Pervasive corruption continues to stand as a catastrophic threat attacking the very credibility of the legislature and the health of democratic governance. Highly destructive practices—including rampant vote-buying, the malicious padding of national budgets, the weaponization and abuse of oversight powers, blind political patronage, and the outright looting of designated constituency funds—have completely decimated public confidence in legislative institutions and destroyed all mechanisms of internal accountability.
- A severe deficit in institutional capacity actively sabotages the functional effectiveness of the legislature. A vast majority of these legislative bodies are plagued by incredibly poor research support networks, chronically inadequate funding streams, a shocking lack of technical proficiency, highly dysfunctional committee systems, virtually non-existent policy analysis frameworks, and an alarming absence of modern technological infrastructure, all of which are mandatory for efficient lawmaking and oversight.
- Heavily compromised and fraudulent electoral systems completely strip the legislative branch of its democratic legitimacy. Widespread electoral fraud, brutal political violence, endless judicial election disputes, and opportunistic political defections violently damage the fabric of representative democracy and rapidly drain public trust. When lawmakers seize power through highly disputed, violent electoral exercises, their sense of accountability to the voting public is entirely destroyed.
- Vigorous legislative supervision is essential to drastically boost transparency, enforce strict fiscal discipline, ensure unyielding accountability, and guarantee good governance. Critical oversight tools—such as intensive committee probes, open public hearings, forensic budgetary analysis, and strict confirmation vetting—function as indispensable constitutional barricades against executive tyranny and administrative malfeasance. However, the actual success of this oversight is entirely contingent upon the assembly's absolute independence, intense professionalism, and moral integrity.
- The ultimate consolidation of democracy is intimately bound to the sheer strength, autonomy, and operational effectiveness of legislative bodies. Highly stable democratic environments are universally characterized by a deep reverence for the separation of powers, functional institutional checks and balances, total legislative autonomy, an unwavering commitment to the rule of law, constitutional absolute supremacy, and unyielding public accountability. Conversely, crippled legislatures directly fuel executive tyranny and guarantee democratic collapse.
- The recent, explosive national controversies linked to proposed electoral changes, highly contested taxation frameworks, and toxic legislative-executive friction serve as glaring evidence of the unresolved tensions surrounding parliamentary autonomy, the abysmal quality of legislative drafting, extreme deficits in democratic accountability, and the



crumbling legitimacy of state policies in Nigeria. These recurring crises loudly amplify the absolute urgency for sweeping institutional and statutory interventions designed to rapidly accelerate legislative development and secure democratic governance.

The profound implications triggered by these extensive findings bridge both institutional and legal spheres. From an institutional standpoint, there is a desperate, immediate necessity to radically fortify legislative committee networks, massively upgrade research and drafting divisions, establish elite policy analysis bureaus, and vastly improve overall legislative professionalism. From a legal perspective, drastic reforms are mandatory to elevate the technical clarity of drafted laws, aggressively enforce strict constitutional compliance, radically strengthen internal accountability protocols, and ultimately resurrect public faith in legislative bodies.

In the final analysis, the long-term survival of democratic governance, the entrenchment of constitutional stability, the enforcement of political accountability, and the broad national development of Nigeria rest entirely upon the cultivation of deeply strong, fiercely independent, and institutionally sophisticated legislatures that possess the courage to execute their constitutional mandates entirely free from executive bullying.

9.0. Recommendations

Driven by the expansive findings detailed above, this academic paper strongly advocates for the immediate adoption of the following measures:

- Comprehensive institutional overhauls must be urgently executed to aggressively fortify the committee systems, vastly improve legislative research capabilities, launch dedicated policy analysis units, and demand high-level legislative professionalism. Correspondingly, deep legal reforms are mandatory to inject total clarity into the lawmaking process, rigidly enforce compliance with constitutional and statutory directives, and aggressively rebuild public trust in all legislative proceedings.
- The operational independence of the legislature must be permanently secured by granting absolute financial and administrative sovereignty to both the National Assembly and the respective State Houses of Assembly.
- The internal capacity of these institutions must be radically upgraded by injecting high-quality research support, establishing advanced policy analysis frameworks, mandating rigorous, continuous professional training for both elected lawmakers and their administrative staff, and fully integrating modern, digital parliamentary technology systems.
- Sweeping constitutional and electoral revisions must be enacted immediately to drastically curb the overpowering dominance of the executive branch and successfully restore the necessary institutional equilibrium among all three arms of government.
- The frameworks governing transparency and accountability within the legislative chambers must be aggressively tightened by deploying uncompromising ethical codes, enforcing brutal anti-corruption protocols, and ensuring that the general public possesses total, unhindered access to all legislative sessions and records.
- A massive surge in public participation must be cultivated by institutionalizing frequent public hearings, sponsoring broad civic engagement campaigns, and launching interactive digital legislative portals designed to permanently entrench citizen involvement in the governance architecture.



- The government, alongside aligned democratic organizations, must pour massive investments into specialized legislative training, the recruitment of elite professional staff, the structural strengthening of committees, and the procurement of advanced technological infrastructure to radically elevate the caliber of both lawmaking and executive oversight.
- Political organizations must aggressively reform their internal democratic processes and foster genuine ideological frameworks to systematically eradicate the destructive culture of patronage politics, thereby drastically improving the accountability of lawmakers and actively driving the final consolidation of democracy.

10. Conclusion

This extensive manuscript rigorously evaluated the developmental arc of Nigeria's legislative institutions, analyzing them intensely through the lenses of historical evolution, constitutional shifts, and the broader parameters of democratic governance. It irrefutably demonstrated that the legislature stands as an indispensable bedrock of any democratic society, mandated to execute absolutely critical functions encompassing the creation of laws, the genuine representation of citizens, deep executive oversight, financial appropriations, and necessary constitutional alterations. Through the aggressive execution of these duties, the legislative branch directly champions systemic accountability, absolute transparency, constitutional fidelity, and mass civic involvement in state affairs.

The exhaustive research revealed that the evolutionary path of the Nigerian legislature has been heavily distorted by the lingering poisons of colonial administration, decades of suffocating military dictatorships, extreme executive overreach, and the complex, deeply flawed political economy unique to the Nigerian state. Even though the Constitution seemingly awards massive, unchecked power to lawmakers, the crippling realities of institutional fragility, systemic corruption, entrenched patronage networks, the toxic monetization of electoral politics, and a highly underdeveloped democratic culture relentlessly neutralize legislative efficiency and destroy its independence.

The analysis additionally proved that ongoing, highly destructive modern challenges—such as rampant electoral fraud, the malicious weaponization of oversight powers, opportunistic political defections, and a massive collapse in public trust—actively sabotage the consolidation of democracy and shatter legislative accountability. Nonetheless, since the highly celebrated restoration of democratic rule in 1999, the National Assembly has undeniably registered notable victories in anchoring constitutional democracy, successfully fighting through a barrage of persistent institutional and political barricades.

The study ultimately concludes that achieving meaningful, lasting legislative development demands significantly more than the mere constitutional documentation of legislative powers. It strictly requires sweeping institutional transformations, absolute legislative sovereignty, unassailably credible electoral processes, strict obedience to the rule of law, aggressive anti-corruption campaigns, and the cultivation of an invincible democratic culture. Ultimately, fiercely powerful and completely autonomous legislatures remain absolutely non-negotiable for the survival of democratic governance, constitutional harmony, governmental accountability, and long-term, sustainable national development across Nigeria.



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